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ABSTRACT

Articles in this publication address the writing process, teaching writing, and research on the teaching of writing, and take the form of personal experience or opinion, or explore the work of others who have contributed to the field. Articles in the first issue of this volume include: "From Grief, Poetry: Expressive Writings from the Westside Tragedy" (Robert Lamm); "Adolescent Writing Paragraph by Paragraph" (Bonnie Faiman); "Personal Memory and Fictional Character" (Kim Stafford); "Sustaining Urgency" (Jan Isenhour); "Everyday Wordcraft" (Helen Collins Sitler); "Grammar...Again" (Edwin Epps); "Teaching Grammar in Context: One Approach" (Harriet Williams); and "Smartboards and Other Smart Solutions to Computer Access" (Patricia Fitzsimmons-Hunter and Charles Moran). Articles in the second issue include: "They Will Choose To Learn: An Alternative to the Lock-Step Classroom" (Jon Appleby); "Just Give Me a Chance" (Richard Mann); "Four Principles Toward Teaching the Craft of Revision" (Mark Farrington); "Teaching the Most Important Things" (Don Gallehr); "Cat Watching: Six Easy Steps to Classroom Poetry" (Scott Peterson); "Partial Successes and Limited Failures: Recognizing the Dissonances in Our Teacherly Talk" (Jane Greer); and "Assessing Computers for Writing: Stepping Back To Move Forward" (Stephen Marcus). Articles in the third issue include: "The Only New Thing under the Sun: 25 Years of the National Writing Project" (Sheridan Blau); "Welcome to Measurement, Inc." (David Glovin); "Where's the Beef? Mississippi's Tech-Prep Initiative in Action" (John Dorroh); "You and Me and a Book Makes Three: Students Write Collaborative Book Reviews with Adult Reading Buddies" (Bernadette Lambert); "Building a Story: The Art of Narrative" (Marilyn Bates); and "Writing Workshop and Real-World Learning: A Deweyian Perspective" (Jo-Anne Kerr). Articles in the fourth issue include: "Puny Poetry Meets Its Match" (Gerri Ruckel and Jim Horrell); "I Was a Journal-Topic Junkie" (Anna Collins Trest); "No Excuses: An Interview with Eugene Garcia" (Art Peterson); "Revising Words, Revising Worlds" (Greta Vollmer); "Annotated Bibliography on Teaching English Language Learners"

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Editors:

Peggy Trump Loofbourrow
Art Peterson

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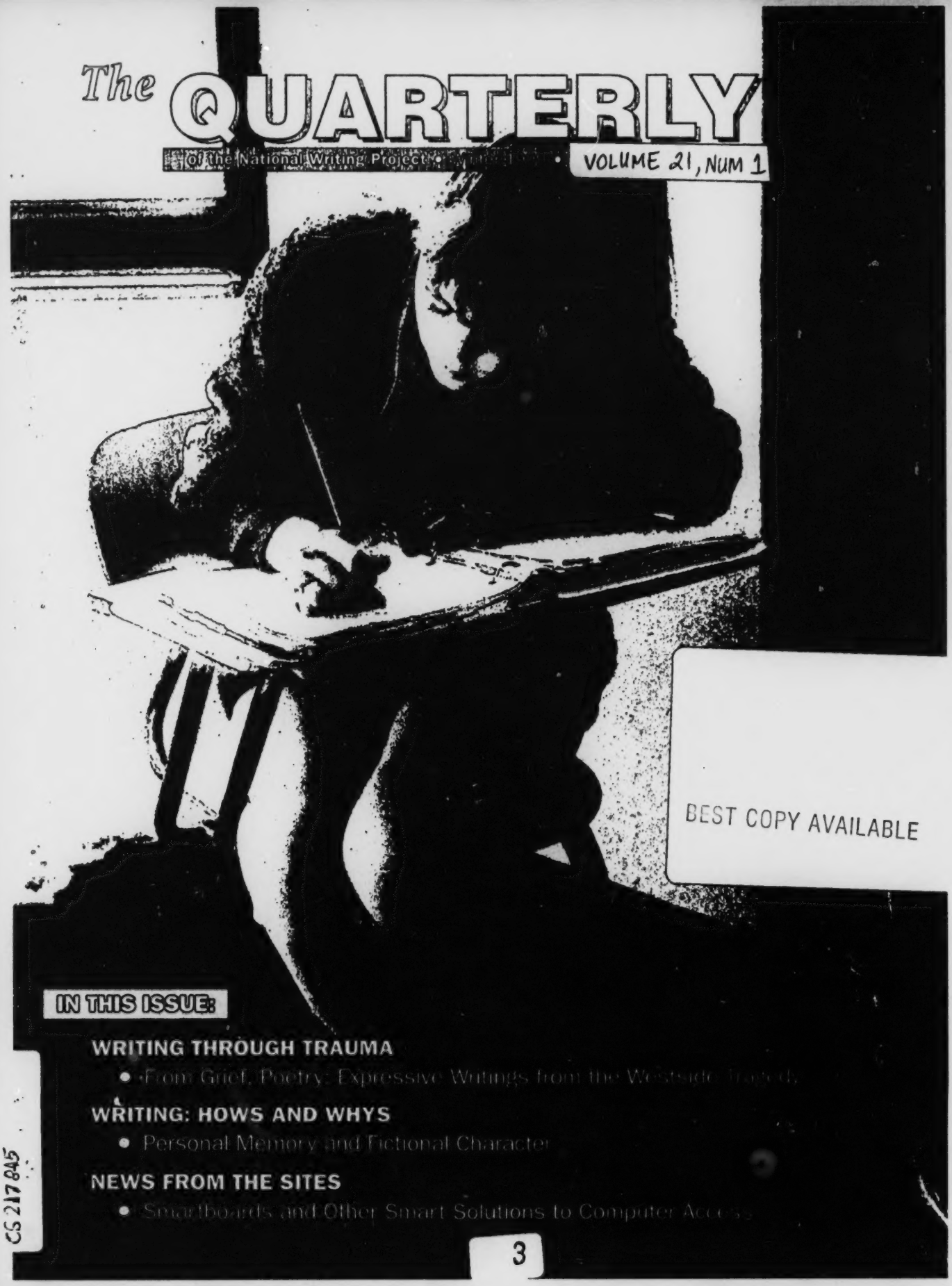

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From Grief, Poetry: Expressive Writings from the Westside Tragedy

BY ROBERT LAMM

I Shall Know Why
by Emily Dickinson
I shall know why when time is over,
And I have ceased to wonder why:
Christ will explain each separate anguish
In the fair schoolroom of the sky.
He will tell me what Peter promised
And I, for wonder at his woe,
I shall forget the drop of anguish
That scalds me now, that scalds me now.

—A poem taught to Jonesboro's Westside Middle School students the morning of the schoolyard shootings.

In the throes of personal grief, of suffering the "drop of anguish that scalds me now," poet Emily Dickinson sought a measure of comfort through writing verse. Her poem "I Shall Know Why" questions the purpose of emotional suffering, then answers itself by professing faith in a divine plan. Emily Dickinson understood the healing power of poetry.

Poets can empower language to elevate sentiment, to ennoble hardship, or to relieve suffering. The rest of us likely live our lives in prose, the plain language that serves us well enough in our everyday transactions. Yet in times of deep emotion, of great joy or deep sorrow, when our souls want to sing or scream but are muted for lack of language, even the most prosaic of us may strive for a poet's voice.

On March 24, 1998, an entire community was plunged into deep sorrow. At Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas, thirteen children and two teachers were gunned down senselessly, allegedly by two classmates. Of those shot, four children and one teacher died from their wounds. Shock and grief were pandemic in Jonesboro. This was a slim, single degree of separation where virtually every citizen knew a casualty or someone bereaved. Perhaps it was the interplay between natural human sympathy, the modest size of the community and the magnitude of the tragedy that sent anguish splashing across Jonesboro's 50,000 citizens. Like Emily Dickinson we felt the scald, questioning "why."

On the local television news programs that followed, the tragedy was explained in the prose of journalism. At the end, however, came something different, not typical of a newscast: a poem was read by the anchorperson. A viewer had sent in a poem expressing a mixture of shock, grief, outrage, and spirituality, trying to make sense out of the senseless. Whatever the verses lacked in technical skill was more than compensated by the heartfelt message.

This poetic response to tragedy was an early indication of a phenomenon that was developing among the bereaved. Over the week that followed, poetry about the tragedy became a regular feature of the evening news. Contributions flowed in to the station, unsolicited. According to Kim Wheeler, assignment editor of KAIT news, "The poems came in from all kinds of people, mailed, faxed...this is the first time I have seen that ever happen, not even after tornadoes and other disasters with sizable losses of life." Students at Westside Middle School wrote poetry also. A seventh-grade class of Westside students eventually presented a grieving parent with a collection of the poems memorializing her daughter. Another anthology was compiled by counselors and published by the National Association of School Psychologists. The Arkansas State University website displayed a collection of poetry about the tragedy. A local songwriter, Lisa Lee, wrote, performed and recorded a song called "Heaven's Newest Angel." Poetry was evident even in some of eulogies delivered by local ministers.

I became intrigued by this spontaneous outpouring of poetry. Part of my interest was simply that I lived in this community; like so many others in Jonesboro, I was in shock. As Director of English Education at Arkansas State University, I had direct contact with some of the middle school teachers and students. I had coached some of those children on a YMCA volleyball team. My life was linked with theirs in these and other ways that continue to reveal themselves after the fact.

I had not witnessed this poetic response to tragedy before, but I understood it at least partly. Poets help explain the phenomenon when they speak of emotion as inspiration, as does William Wordsworth in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads": "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." Similarly, Robert Frost observes that a "poem ...begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness." Certainly, poets understand poetry and its uses. However, the poetry springing from the Westside tragedy was being written by people who probably never would describe themselves as poets. Why would relatively unskilled writers turn to an unfamiliar medium?

To understand the phenomenon we should first know details of the event inspiring the poets. We will then examine the event as treated in the text of three complete poems

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and one section of a eulogy. From excerpts of poems we will identify recurring themes. Finally, we will draw upon psychological theories to explain the relationship between poetry writing and the grieving process.

The Tragic Event

The scenario unfolds on a windy day in late March 1998. Two middle school boys, ages 13 and 11, feign illness in order to be excused from attending classes. They attire themselves as hunters, wearing camouflage hats, shirts, and pants. Breaking into the gun cabinet of the younger boy's grandfather, they take three semiautomatic rifles, four pistols, and ammunition; elsewhere they acquire six other pistols. Stealing a van, they transport their weapons and themselves to a location just north of the middle school campus. They position themselves under the cover of some trees, allowing a clear line of fire perpendicular to the west doors some 100 yards away. At 12:34 p.m., the younger boy sneaks into the school building, pulls the fire alarm, and then dashes back to their concealed position.

Inside the middle school, teachers and students react as they would to any routine fire drill, exiting in an orderly fashion — 150 through the west doors. The two boys begin a shooting spree. Bullets that whiz by some students later are described as sounding like bottle rockets. As victims fall to the ground, other students are slow to interpret. At first, some believe they are observing a game or a dramatic enactment; some applaud. Then realization. Then pandemonium. By the time it is over, fifteen are struck down. Four students and one teacher die.

The Poems

One Normal Day
by Amanda Gragg, 7th grade

This one day of school, just one normal day.
Then at 12:34, it changed in every way.
At the sound of the drill we all ran outside.
We saw people fall; we just wanted to hide.
Such an awful day that I'll never forget.
We just stood there and watched
Wondering which friend was hit.

I remember Paige and her wonderful smile.
Passing her in the hall made your day worthwhile.
Then Natalie Brooks and her loving heart.
She carried her Bible, I remember that part.
Stephanie Johnson, she'd always say Hi.
And wave at me happily while passing me by.
Britthney Varner, I didn't know her that well.
But she was outgoing and funny you could tell.
Mrs. Shannon Wright, so loving and true.
She had a strong heart,
and I thought she'd pull through.
These are the people we lost that we love.
But someday I'll see them in the heavens above.

"One Normal Day" was one of the first poems written by students in response to the tragedy. The author, Amanda Gragg, was already in the habit of writing verses to entertain an elderly friend, a blind man. After the tragedy while sitting in home room, Amanda began writing "to get stuff off my mind"

After completing the poem, Amanda shared with friends. Many of them consequently decided to try poems themselves, which they subsequently shared with one another. It was days later that their teacher, Debbie Pelley, made a class assignment: "If I were the mother of your lost classmate, Stephanie Johnson, I would want to know everything about her last day. Write something—a letter, a poem, a paragraph—for Stephanie's mother." Notably, very few letters and no paragraphs were written; instead, most students chose to write poems. The poems more often addressed the students' reactions to the events, not Stephanie's last day. Once the students began writing they seemed to follow their own imperatives, using the poems to work through their grief.

"One Normal Day" begins with a chronological account of the event. The shock of the incident is conveyed by contrasting the day's normal beginning with the abrupt "we saw people fall." The middle section of the poem functions as a farewell to the deceased as each student and teacher is named and memorialized in a couplet. Some touching details, such as the fact that Natalie carried her Bible, are included in this section. The concluding couplet gives hope through religion, thus resembling the poetic strategy used by Emily Dickinson in "I Shall Know Why."

A few students placed their poems on Stephanie's vacant desk. This display evolved into a shrine that remained until the end of the school year.

Ms. Pelly collected and bound the poetry, which the class then presented as a gift to Stephanie's mother.

Children of the Wind
by Brianne Meeker, 6th grade

When the wind blows, your world falls apart
And a heartbeat is sought after,
Never knowing when your turn is on its way,
Like the flowers that gently just blow away.
Like a child. Like a heartbeat.

When the wind blows, all shivers and sways
Like a world that is unsteady in many ways,
Never knowing when you

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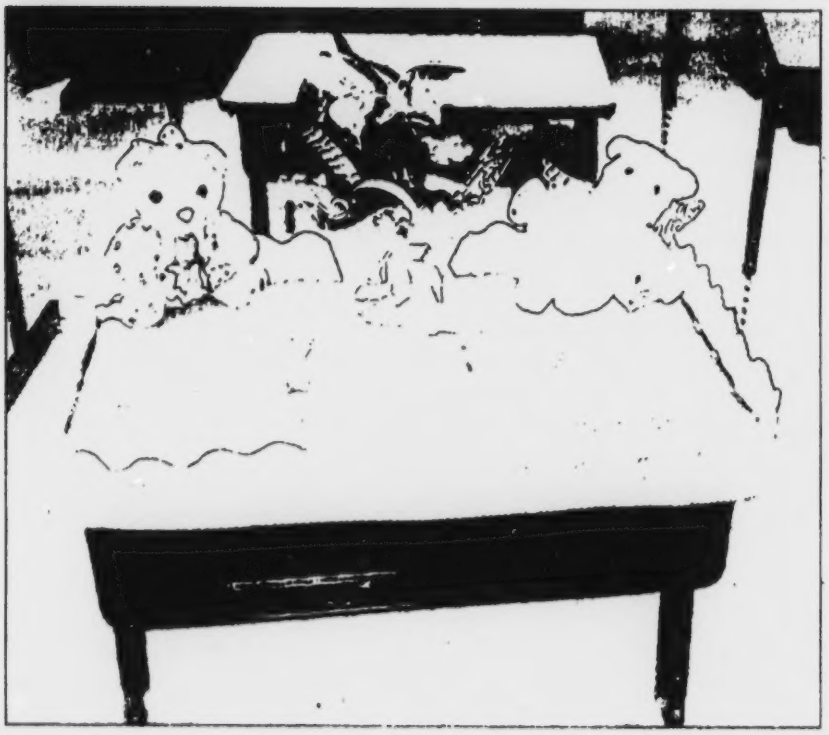

Stephanie Johnson's vacant desk

are going to be harmed
Like a child unharmed
but scarred in many ways.
Like a child. Like a heartbeat.

When the wind blows, water scatters away
Like children from harm when
death unfolds its arms
Like a child should.
Like a child. Like a heartbeat.
—Dedicated to my teacher and friend, Mrs. Wright

"Children of the Wind" is deep and remarkably well crafted for such a young writer as Brianne Meeker. Its free verse bears images of mortality and vulnerability that haunt each stanza, repeating and intertwining. Written just three days after the incident, the poem was spontaneous and self-assigned, taking only about 15 minutes of composing time. Brianne says that the poem is intended to be a song.

On the afternoon Brianne wrote the poem, she was accompanying her mother and brother on a fishing expedition to a friend's pond. In the days following the shootings Brianne clung to her mother, staying close as if for protection. But as they arrived at the pond Brianne withdrew from her mother, declining to participate because at that time she did not care to see anything perish, not even a fish. Since Brianne routinely kept a journal, she had a notebook handy. Sitting among some nearby trees, she began to write.

The wind, gusting then as it had the day of the incident, became a key, repeated image of Brianne's poem: a destructive force of nature that reveals no conscience. Other, more delicate images drawn from the countryside around her are likened to a child: a leaf, a flower, the water — all are helpless, all are affected capriciously by the dangerous breeze. The image of a heartbeat, a symbol of life, is linked with a child. In the parlance of the poet, we learn that a child can be killed as easily as a flower can be scattered by the breeze.

As the Bells Started Ringing
by Tiffany Ishmael, 6th grade; and
Samantha Ishmael, 10th grade

As the bells started ringing, I started to smile.
I thought it would be the perfect chance
to visit with friends for a while.
We filled the hallway like any other drill
And exited the metal doors
to see our loved ones killed.

The guns sounded like the fourth of July,
but the sight wasn't as nice.
My mind went blank, my heart stopped
and my body froze like ice.
I saw people running
and others on the ground.
I just sort of stood there looking all around.

I notice familiar faces falling down in pain.
Why was this happening?
Who was to blame?
I never got to say goodbye
to friends that I once knew.
I wish I could go back in time.
I wish there was something I could do.

This wasn't supposed to happen.
It's hard to believe it did.
I saw some of my best friends
get killed by another kid.
The Prom and Graduation are things
they will never get to see.

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Their parents won't get the chance
to give them car keys.

They won't be able to cry on our shoulders
when someone breaks their hearts
Because a tragedy had to come
and tear their lives apart.
It's hard to wear a smile
to hide a million tears,
But I'll eventually get over it
on through the years.

I know I'll see them once again,
but in a sacred place
And we can pick up right where we left off,
and my pain will be erased.

The first half of "As the Bells Started Ringing" is a narrative of the incident, beginning with the false fire drill. It progresses from exterior details and sense impressions (steels doors, firecracker sounds) to interior impressions (astonishment and confusion) of the observer. Typical of many Westside poems, it asks "why?" Near its conclusion, the poem laments losses—the experiences the victims and families will never share. It ends with an uplifting message that is couched in faith in an afterlife.

"As the Bells Started Ringing" was written collaboratively by middle-schooler Tiffany Ishmael with her older sister Samantha. After the shooting, Samantha and the rest of the Ishmael family acted as a support group for Tiffany. Samantha believes she began to see the event through Stephanie's eyes: "I was feeling the same pain." The process of composing collaboratively helped both girls manage their grief. According to psychologist Nick Mazza, collaboration offers many of the same benefits of individual writing: recognition of feelings, a measure of control over one's own emotional response, and an outlet for those emotions. Collaboration adds to that a sense of cohesion with another individual or group, diminishing isolation and validating the experience.

The Eulogy

Seven days after the tragedy, the Jonesboro Ministerial Alliance held a memorial service for the benefit of the community. Called the "Service for Hope and Healing," an estimated 8000 attended. The service included a giant-screen, videotaped message of condolences from President Clinton, a live appearance by U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, a performance by an 850-member all-denominational choir, and a series of short eulogies delivered by many of Jonesboro's ministers. Of these eulogies, the one delivered by Reverend Adrian Rodgers was singularly moving, receiving a standing ovation after a passage naming the five loved ones:

> *Even though the deaths of these students and their teacher were untimely and tragic, we can take comfort in knowing that Natalie Brooks, whom her mother said loved to learn, is now with the Master Teacher. Paige Herring, whom teachers and fellow students called 'the peacemaker,' is now with the 'Prince of Peace.' Stephanie Johnson's mother said her daughter shone as brightly as her favorite color, yellow. Stephanie is now with the 'Bright and Morning Star.' Britthney Varner's mother, Suzann, said her daughter loved older people. Well, now she can talk to Methuselah, who was 969 years old when he died, and to the Ancient of Days, who is from everlasting to everlasting. Mrs. Wright, who gave her life for another, is now with the One who gave His life for her.*
>
> — Excerpt from eulogy delivered by Rev. Adrian R. Rodgers

Delivered in a rousing style reminiscent of Dr. Martin Luther King, the passage sent waves of good feeling through an audience haggard with sadness. The biblical allusion to Methuselah actually received appreciative laughter from all attending. It led to a remarkable moment: people were laughing and crying at the same time. By the conclusion of the passages, all rose to their feet and applauded their gratitude. To this day, some of those who attended cannot tell the story of being "lifted up" without involuntarily reexperiencing that same emotional rush, tears and all. Over the days that followed, Reverend Rodgers would receive over 500 phone calls and letters of thanks. Two congregations offered him churches.

I believe that passage of the eulogy drew its power from its poetic elements, particularly balance and symmetry. Each of the departed is described in two clauses: the first, earthly and in the past; the second, heavenly and perpetual. In each pair of clauses, the earthly image transforms into a similar heavenly image, giving us a visual impression of the otherwise invisible spiritual transformation undergone by the loved one. For example, we envision first a girl being kind to an old person; next, she is pictured in heaven with the oldest person mentioned in the Bible.

Reverend Rodgers had delivered only one eulogy before this. He says, though, that when he heard of the shooting he strongly

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felt the grief of the parents and knew that he would be called upon to lift their spirits.

Themes

Many of the Westside poems exhibit common themes, some of which can be recognized as the sequential stages of grieving studied by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, author of *On Death and Dying*: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Other themes that appear in the poems include expressions of fear, reflections on mortality, and tributes to the loved ones.

Some of students' poems focus on one or a few of those themes of grieving. "Children of the Wind" examines mortality, perhaps with an underlying expression of fear. The poem is interesting not only for what it examines but also for what it omits: there is no mention of the lost friends, no overt expression of acceptance. Upon reading this poem, one cannot escape the feeling that the author is still struggling toward acceptance.

Remarkably, some of the poems display most or all the stages. For example, the poem "As the Bells Started Ringing" expresses denial by stating, "This wasn't supposed to happen. It's hard to believe it did." Anger appears in, "Who was to blame?" Perhaps bargaining is evident in the statement, "I wish I could go back in time. I wish there was something I could do." Depression is revealed in the line, "It's hard to wear a smile to hide a million tears." Acceptance concludes the poem: "I know I'll see them once again, but in a sacred place...and my pain will be erased." Such poems act out the process as if vicariously grieving for the poet.

Jonesboro students offer their gift of poetry to Tina Johnson McIntyre, Stephanie Johnson's mother

Debbie Pelley, the teacher who encouraged her class to write about their grief, provides perspective on the grieving process in her letter to Tina Johnson McIntyre, mother of Stephanie Johnson: "I don't think we have to feel guilty for feeling emotions of bitterness if we will move on through them [the stages] and back to God as a loving father."

Poetry as Therapy

When the National Crisis Team began their crisis intervention at Westside, they advised teachers to get students to express themselves, explaining that within certain boundaries the concern should be with the ability to express rather than with the content of the expression: the repressed students are at greatest risk. According to team leader Scott Poland, "teachers are often in the best position to spot indications of some troubling behaviors. We don't want to put teachers in the position of being therapists, but they can refer to counselors or parents." Thus the expressive nature of poetry constitutes part of its therapeutic value. According to Westside teacher's aide Rose McGowan, the poetry served as a window on the children's coping mechanisms: "After the shootings, you could see the hurt on the kids' faces, but you didn't know how they were dealing with their feelings until you could see it on paper. Poetry was a positive way to expose their inner feelings."

Psychologist Nick Mazza explains the value of Poetry Therapy, the clinical use of language arts in growth and therapeutic capacities: for trauma victims, poetry therapy provides a release and helps the individual gain a sense of order and control. According to Mazza, "The writing serves as an outlet and safety

valve, a safe place to begin to express feelings and sort them out."

Control of the emotion seems connected to control over the language of poetry. Educator James Britton confirms the value of control: when told that a student had begun weeping over a piece of her own writing and had left class to shape it, he observed, "And, I should think, the more shaped, the more therapeutic" (Britton, 1982).

John Fox, a certified poetry therapist, regards poetry as a therapeutic means of self-discovery: "Poetry is a natural medicine; it is like a homeopathic tincture derived from the stuff of life itself.... Poetry provides guidance, revealing what you did not know you knew before you wrote or read the poem. This moment of surprising yourself with your own words of wisdom or of being surprise by the poems of others is at the heart of poetry as healer."

As we realize the value of poetry in our lives, especially the personal need for poetic expression in times of emotional trauma, the role of teachers of English and language arts assumes a new dimension. Understanding and writing poetry is not merely an exercise in art appreciation. It is more than just a means of developing the ability to analyze and communicate. When a teacher teaches poetry, the lesson ultimately may be about emotional survival. Every student is "a poet and don't know it." Helping a student discover the inner poet may be one of the most important goals of teachers of writing.

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Robert Lamm is director of the Northeast Arkansas Writing Project.

U. of Oregon Writing Project TC Wins Hechinger Award

Each year at the November meeting of the National Writing Project, the NWP and The Center For the Study of Writing present the Fred Hechinger Award to a classroom teacher who in his or her work successfully connects writing research to writing practice. The award is named for the late *New York Times* education writer who, until his death in 1995, served as chair of CSW's National Advisory Board.

This year's award went to Linda Christensen, a teacher for more than 20 years at Jefferson High School in Portland, Oregon. Christensen has had a long-time connection with NWP, having participated in the summer institute at the University of Oregon in 1980.

In nominating Christensen, Nathaniel Teich, Project Director at the Oregon Writing Project at the University of Oregon, writes that "both her classroom teaching and her public professional activities have been grounded in rigorous critical scholarship, questioning established assumptions and practices while advocating a responsible agenda for change. Additionally, she has admirable ethical concerns for respectful understanding of a multi-cultural society, and warmth and sensitivity to students of all abilities."

The awards committee recognized Christensen for her "outstanding work with diverse groups of students, and her clear connection between the research on multilingual, multicultural classrooms and the creative teaching practices she developed."

Adolescent Writing Paragraph by Paragraph

BY BONNIE FAIMAN

In recent years, teachers have added some new forms to their basic bag of motivational tools to inspire student writing — the I-Search paper, the Dialectical Journal, and the internal monologue, for instance. But this does not mean that the tried and true writing prompt babies should be thrown out with the proverbial bath water.

One of the representative forms that remains valid, particularly for middle school students, is the autobiographical vignette. Most of us have learned how to direct these autobiographical writing prompts. We know that the classic request to write about "What I Did on My Summer Vacation" is likely to produce uninteresting chronologies while the more specific "My Most Memorable Meal" may summon rich details of mouth-watering prose.

On the contrary, however, a teacher does not want to make the personal prompt too specific. Almost every student, for instance, can find room to get into the topic "A Lie I Told," but if the prompt were on the topic "A Lie I Told to My English Teacher," large numbers of students would claim they have never lied to an English teacher. Some of them would be telling the truth.

But as teachers we should understand that when an autobiographical prompt is broad enough to include everyone, we need to be prepared for a whole variety of responses. When I assigned the prompt, "A Lie I Told," I urged students to treat this topic lightly, telling how a fib turned out to be funny, or perhaps, how the lie backfired, resulting in a little moral lesson.

Many pupils who chose to write about fibs and lies did, in fact, write about innocuous topics: one girl told of putting the supper dishes away when she knew them to be unclean, others wrote about staying up late with the TV or with a book under the bed covers. There were stories of borrowing a sibling's clothes without permission and eating half a gallon of ice cream and blaming it on the dog — all time-honored 12-year-old topics. There were others:

> *At a party I went to, I was asked if my dress was new, and I said, "Yes, it is." But really, my mom bought it at a shop that sells used clothes. I felt funny lying because the party was at my church, and God might have heard me.*

Andrew read his composition to the class, at the request of Rebecca who sat behind him reading over his shoulder. A sheepish grin widened over his mouthful of braces as he read:

> *One Saturday when my parents were playing golf, I broke the antenna off the little kitchen TV. The man at the hardware store sold me a new one and I learned how to replace it without my parents ever knowing anything. About a week later, my mother said to my stepfather, "I thought the TV antenna was silver. Here it is, gold. What-do-you-know." I went into my bedroom and never said anything.*

Other students entered a more seriously confessional mode. Caroline wrote:

> *I stole some little soaps from a pushcart in the mall. I feel bad. My mother suspected that something was wrong, and asked me, "Did you do anything at the mall today that you wouldn't be proud to tell me?" I said, "No." I know it was a long time ago but I still feel awful because I think I was wrong.*

But another student went even further, using the opening I had provided to write of a dark and devastating secret. Alex wrote and wrote while others were wrapping up or finished. Her brow was furrowed in concentration and melancholy. Her eyes never wavered from her computer screen. When the printout came out twenty minutes after the class was over, I found her typed paper.

> *On the weekends I go to hockey and I am the goalie. So I have to wear more equipment than the rest of the team. I play for the Red Hornets, an all boys team. I don't like to lie, but I love to play hockey, so I suit-up and go out and nobody on the other team ever knows I'm a girl. When I'm asked a question I answer, "Grunt!" which doesn't come out sounding like the way it's spelled. It helps that my name is Alex. It could be anybody's name. I don't tell the truth, and I don't lie. Who cares anyway?*

But this funny story, which may itself have been a little lie, was not the story Alex wanted to tell. At the end of her hockey piece, Alex had typed in a big, bold font:

> *PLEASE GO TO MY FILE AND READ THE PARAGRAPH I WROTE UNDER 'DAD.' I DIDN'T PRINT IT OUT, BUT YOU CAN READ IT.*

Knowing that it might be important, I found a quiet moment and her disk, and read what she had written:

> *I tell a lie all the time. I say that my dad died of a heart attack and that's not really what he died from. I'm scared to tell you what he died of. When I was five years old, he got*

Writing through Trauma

drunk and went to a tree and hung himself. He used to go to the Dunkin' Donuts across the street, so he knew the best tree. The next morning two detectives came to my house and I was asleep so my mother answered the door and let them in. The police said there was a body hung last night and he had a wallet with this address in it. My mom had to go to the station to identify the body later. "But first, I have one more question," said the officer. "Does he have any children?" And my mother said yes, that there was me. It was my dad. He actually killed himself. I'd rather say it was a heart attack.

Alex's paper seems an emotional torture and a catharsis. Normally, however, these directed but open-ended prompts usually bring predictable responses, and a teacher can be pretty sure what seventh graders will write when asked to explore a general topic.

"A Time I Disappointed Myself" usually brings repartees about not studying for a major test, bullying a neighborhood child, or letting a baby cry until a commercial break while watching a TV show during a baby sitting job. But the teacher needs to be prepared as well for the exception when a child replays an incident that is more revealing.

A Time When I Disappointed Myself
by Juan C.

We came back from a week of vacation at Cape Cod and the car was filled with garbage bags. There was left-over food in one, dirty and wet clothes in another, garbage and dirty diapers that smelled up the car, and games. We passed a dump in Mansfield and my father pulled into the dirt road. He told me to get out and throw away the garbage and the trash, which I did. After another twenty-five minutes or so, my parents realized that the smell hadn't gone away, and that I had thrown out the dirty clothes, worth hundreds of dollars.

They didn't get mad or yell. They knew how I felt. They turned around but by the time we got to the dump it was too dark to go hunting for our stuff among all the other garbage bags, every one green too. If my dad had yelled, I wouldn't be so disappointed in myself. I wish he had gotten mad instead of upset.

In the last two sentences here, Juan seems to be dealing with the real source of his hurt and disappointment, an insight that may not have occurred to him before this writing.

For the teacher, writing like this is a kind of trade off. While the exercise may be cathartic for the student, the teacher is cast into a role of intruder on a secret diary entry. Any personal topic, regardless of how seemingly unobtrusive, may lead a student to explore issues that some teachers believe are none of a teacher's business.

Despite the risks, however, these autobiographical paragraphs motivate students to move beyond writing to fulfill an assignment toward writing that means something to them.

So I propose that as we go through changes in writing education, we hold on to our belief that the directed autobiographical paragraph remain a powerful tool for all students, particularly middle schoolers. Such narratives may prove enlightening and surprising to students — and especially to their teachers.

Bonnie Faiman teaches language arts at Walsch Middle School in Framingham, MA.

Personal Memory and Fictional Character

BY KIM STAFFORD

For years I have gone to class unprepared to teach. Please don't tell my Dean. I don't want to live this way, and I'm sometimes stricken with guilt. But the world is such a busy place, and the phone rings, the in-box fills with mail I feel I must answer, and I'm so optimistic about my ability to do it all that class-time rolls around, and I haven't planned my lecture on how to write.

On second thought, though, maybe this inability is actually my greatest resource. Maybe you should tell my Dean — that I have, by force of long practice, attained a Zen-like presence of mind when I walk into class "unprepared." In this trancelike state, everything becomes rich opportunity for teaching.

I remember a conversation I overheard between a faculty member and our writer in residence, Jim Heynen.

"I would consider it unconscionable," said the professor, "to begin a class session without complete preparation — an understood subject of inquiry and agreement on relevant texts considered well in advance."

"I would consider it unconscionable," Jim replied, "to begin class with such an established sense of subject and relevant resources that we would prevent the intuitive connections at the heart of true learning."

Of course the truth lies between these extremes, but I lean toward Jim's hunch. I remember my father saying that early in his teaching career, he would ask himself at the beginning of each term, "Have I read enough to be a good teacher?" And he would have to answer, "No, not yet." Then one year, when he asked himself this question, he realized he could answer, "Yes, I have now read enough to be a good teacher." But then a different question presented itself: "Am I a good teacher?" And he had to answer, "No, I'm not — not always. For it's like art: sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't."

Another time he said to me that the days he found himself carrying all kinds of readings and plans to class, he knew he wasn't prepared to teach. But when he approached class with nothing, except a question or two in which for some reason he felt great confidence, then he was ready.

It often happens that thirty minutes before a three-hour graduate writing seminar is to begin, I am standing at my desk looking at the clutter before me with a wild hunter's total concentration: what from my current mail, my recent reading or travel, or from the notebook in my pocket might form the basis for our time tonight? Almost always, I am overwhelmed with treasure. For I find I have been preparing nonstop since the last class, simply by attending to the richest things I stumble upon. A lecture I attend, a story I read, a conversation I overhear, a quirky juxtaposition I observe, even a dream or a line from my own writing may braid their way into a sequence of writing and discussion activities we will productively try together. There may even be a short lecture in the mix, or what often feels like a sermon when I come to give it.

To test this more charitable interpretation of my teaching habits, I have typed up, as an exercise, the cluster of ideas, readings, and invitations I grabbed for a recent three-hour seminar at the Northwest Writing Institute. In the preceding week, my wife and I had attended a lecture by Kazuo Ishiguro; browsing in the library, I had been seduced by a book on Edward Hopper; nights I had been reading a biography of Emerson; my students' questions the previous week had me thinking about Carol Bly's *The Passionate, Accurate Story*, which I was bringing to class — and somehow all this led me to imagine a series of writing invitations sparked by an old idea from the short story writer, H.E. Bates. As we sat down together, I asked the class (searching for an opening) if they had some recent questions suggested by the writing they had been doing. One said, yes, she was wondering what to do with some pieces she had written for a memoir class, now that she wanted to turn to fiction. This caused me to pull out my notebook, and read to her what I had written following the lecture by Ishiguro, and we were on our way. Here is roughly how it went:

1. Kazuo Ishiguro talks about the "vacuum" surrounding certain fictional characters. They are defined by what they don't say, what they don't do. The most powerful thing about Spencer, the butler in *Remains of the Day*, for example, is the torrent of feeling he never allows to surface, the life story of companionship and expression he never allows to rise from his polite restraint. Ishiguro says that in his novel *Pale View of the Hills*, he has told a story based on vacuums — holes devoid of information but surrounded by tremendous expectation. The novel begins with a woman making a bold announcement about her daughter's suicide, then saying nothing more about this. Instead, she tells another story. It may be too painful sometimes, Ishiguro says, to tell something directly. So the oblique story carries the resonance it does not directly tell.

Writing: Hows and Whys

2. Characters in Edward Hopper's paintings — the cafe couple in "Nighthawks," for example, or the woman with the letter in "Hotel Room," the couple in "Sea Watchers," the lone figure in "Automat" — are at the end of some story not specified. They sit still, remembering. Some episode of excitement, of coherence has passed, and left them in their silence. (This suggests the writing exercises of writing what one Hopper character will never tell another, or writing one of your own memories in the voice of a Hopper character, or writing the dialog of the couple when they first met, or a monologue of inner thoughts by one, then the other....)

3. Goethe said, "'The beginning and end of all literary activity is the reproduction of the world that surrounds me by means of the world that is in me." Edward Hopper kept this quotation in his wallet, and told friends, "To me, that applies to painting from memory."

4. The novelist H.E. Bates reports that he would regularly write quick biographies of people he glimpsed on trains, or in parks in the anonymity of London. He would intuit from the carriage of the body, the set of the face, the helpless expressions of hand and eye a whole life predicament. These sketches became the basis of his fictional characters. On several occasions, he found out by chance the truth of his intuitions — with a glimpse, he had seen it all.

5. Emerson had this to say on the use of familiar things in art: "In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lessons for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impressions with good-humored inflexibility, then most when the cry of voices is on the other side."

6. Question: how can writers draw on their reservoir of memory without being limited to strict autobiography? How can we avoid "spending our capital," but instead learn to write forever on the interest from our capital: fiction based on the library of memory transformed? Every vivid memory holds some essential truth about one's vision of the world. How to refract this through characters?

7. Someone said that all you have forgotten becomes compost for the garden of your imagination.

8. One rich beginning for writing of all kinds is the 3 - 10,000 word autobiography recommended by Carol Bly in *The Passionate, Accurate Story.* (I do urge a reading of that book with all its richness about this project.) One approach is to write episodes of a page or two in the order they occur to you, without regard to chronology or "importance" of the memory. This becomes a basis for poetry, fiction, essay, and other forms, in addition to strict memoir.

9. This all suggests an exercise for writers, by which we can draw on memory but produce fiction. We can savor strangers around us, and invite them to become fictional characters in possession of our own most vivid recollections. I invite everyone to try some variation of the following:

- Write your random autobiography of 3 - 10,000 words in a series of episodes garnished with maximum detail. No order, no development, just rich moments told in particular. Get 5-10 pages into this project this week, and then keep going until you reach 10,000 words.

- Collect a set of characters from observation of strangers in life and art: half-page profiles of intuited wants, fears, family backgrounds, adventures, losses, weaknesses, visions, and other internal and external particulars — just start taking dictation on your guessing faculty as you observe characters around you.

- Do some listing and clustering in which you graft several of your own memories onto particular characters you have observed (it might be wise to change gender, age, and social situation so you don't end up writing about yourself, or someone very much like yourself).

- Write a story in which two or more of these characters meet and tell some truth, hide some truth, and see what happens. You are grafting yourself onto the stranger and telling that hybrid life with full freedom.

  The idea is for characters you half-observe and half-invent to remember and enhance things you actually did in ways that make them discover things you have never known.

10. You don't write your whole life, but the vivid parts that have stayed with you. You don't write a character's whole story, but

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Sustaining Urgency

BY JAN ISENHOUR

I have often used the word urgency to describe the way I feel when I'm ready to write. And so in reading *Bird by Bird*, I had a pleasant moment of recognition when Anne Lamott also used that word. Remember her chapter on writer's block? Keep working, she advised, and the following may happen: "It was like catching amoebic dysentery. I was just sitting there minding my business, and then the next minute I rushed to my desk with an urgency I had not believed possible" (180). While Lamott's sense of urgency sounds more scatological than mine, I know exactly what she's talking about.

When I launch a writing activity in one of my classes, I watch for the number of students who experience the urgency to write. It takes a lot of careful setup to bring a group of human beings to the moment when they are desperate to write—would postpone any other immediate gratification for the chance to put pen to paper or fingers to keys in order to share a story, an opinion, a thought, or just some random image. Over time I've come to believe that a writing teacher's first worry ought to be finding ways to bring a group of people to the moment when they are experiencing the urgency to write.

I've also learned that it just will not do to say something as simple and seemingly straightforward as the following: "On Friday you will all turn in a story about your grandmother" or "For class tomorrow prepare a paragraph that explains the structure of protein." If either of these prompts, on their own, made anyone feel they had caught amoebic dysentery, it was for entirely different reasons than the urgency to get quickly to paper and write.

Given the difficulty of learning how to create that sense of urgency, you'd think we'd automatically be wise enough to know how to keep it going. Observation tells me this is seldom the case. In addition to teaching writing workshops, we often have school groups who visit the Carnegie Center for writing and computer activities, which gives us the opportunity to reflect on our own teaching habits and to observe the teaching habits of others.

Here's a common occurrence: a group of middle school students, accompanied by their teachers and a number of other adults who have been invited along for crowd control, come for a writing activity and computer lesson. Our stock offering is a poetry lesson, a simple formula poem centering on a window that has been important in the writer's life. This exercise, coupled with the lure of the computer, is magic. Students immediately buy in and within five minutes are intent on composing, revising, and printing a poem. They are focused, quiet, and for a moment, as grown-up as any writer imaginable. They have the urgency to write.

The wisest teachers who accompany these young writers sit at a computer themselves and write the assignment or circulate quietly about the class helping with computer problems or simple writing glitches. The adults who frustrate us the most spend their time talking while the children are trying to write, talking either to each other or to the children themselves. "Did you watch the Cats play last night, Chad?" they boom convivially as Chad jumps in his chair. I've seen the flicker of annoyance that passes across the child's face when he loses a thought before it's penned to the paper.

Another sure way to kill the sense of urgency is to mis-pace class time. After a wonderful preliminary set full of

prewriting, models, perhaps a piece of great literature, the class period is nearly over and instead of allowing the release that comes with an extended period of time for writing, the teacher looks at the class and says, "Well, we're just about out of time for today, folks, so we'll pick up tomorrow where we left off." Not bloody likely. I wouldn't want to imply that I haven't guessed wrong about the pace of a class period. I simply want to remind all of us that such occurrences must be the rare exception rather than the rule.

Let's say that we've created the ideal conditions for launching a writing activity. We've allotted enough writing time. We're managing to keep our mouths shut. Our final chance to extinguish the fires of urgency before they have a chance to rage out of control is to dishonor our students' experience by turning to an unrelated task. "This is sacred writing time," we say, but what we do is pick up the roll book, or a stack of papers, or the book order, or whatever other paperwork seems most pressing to us at the moment. I'm not naive enough to assert that a teacher should never take care of paperwork during school hours. However, I do believe that if we hope our children will take writing seriously, that if we expect them to give it their full intellectual attention, we must write with them. We must honor the seriousness of the work we are asking them to do by doing it ourselves. We must recognize that moments of growth for our students, the very formation of the safe classroom for writing, depends on our being an ordinary citizen in the community of writers rather than its mayor, or worse yet the bookkeeper.

And last, if we would help them look forward to the next occasion for writing with a glad heart, we would give them time to share their words, even if only with one other person. If I've written a poem, for example, I'm generally feeling terrified but proud. I don't know if it's any good. I suspect not, but I hope so. If I have to wait a day or a week or even a month to have an audience, I definitely will have convinced myself that it's not good. I need to touch base with another person, even if it's only to share one line of something I've just written.

As I finish these words to you, my fingers are flying across the keys. I feel the urgency to write. At the same time I'm in awe of what a hard job it is, how serendipitous when all conditions converge to make this single creative moment. I know that I want more of these moments, and I believe that more often than we know, our students want them as well.

Jan Isenhour is director of the Bluegrass Writing Project.

Personal Memory and Fictional Character

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> the deft fragments that must be told. The whole secret in writing, the hinge-pin that opens all, is the ability to recognize the good line, the part that sings, the sliver that is new, and old, and deeper than what surrounds it — idea, rhythm, insight — the whole work of writing to hone this habit of selection. We find the small, rich beginning that speaks, and we let it grow according to an imaginative logic of its own. End of sermon.

And then we did some short writing exercises to test these ideas, shared some of our discoveries, and the three hours were over. We had a major project ahead of us, for any who chose to carry out this sequence in our own writing practice. And the next week's class was pretty much taken care of, as we would report what was happening as we married personal memory to fictional character. If I were to arrive then too prepared with new lessons, the unfolding of this one would be crimped in the bud. Make a note to myself to step back next week, and hear some work in progress.

It may be, in fact, that this approach to teaching is the educational equivalent of what Ishiguro was talking about. Maybe the vacuum surrounding the teacher's intention becomes the opportunity for telling stories to each other that is the deepest source of learning.

"How long did it take you to prepare for class?"

"All my life."

Kim Stafford is director of the Oregon Writing Project at Lewis and Clark.

Everyday Wordcraft

BY HELEN COLLINS SITLER

My mother worked as a secretary and a bank teller. Today, retired and widowed, she is an active volunteer in her small, rural town. My father was a funeral director and, in his later years, a deputy coroner. My parents' talk about work swirled around my brother and me as we grew up. The two of us listened, but in the self-centeredness of childhood and teenage years, paid only cursory attention. Only now, many years removed from the family dinner table where my parents spoke about their work, am I coming to understand how a conversation about Chamber of Commerce minutes or a misprint in the obituary column represented my parents' highly-developed literacies. Only now am I beginning to understand the depth and significance of their everyday wordcraft.

Discovering a Writing Mother

No doubt you are wondering what this is all about as you are opening the envelope and unfolding the papers. Well, it is about our Family Bible.... This Swedish Bible has pages for family records of births, deaths, marriages, etc. It is badly in need of rebinding.... The attached quote of $142.00 is what I am writing you about. Would you be willing to chip in to cover this cost of $142. 00? ... This book must be kept in our family and kept up-to-date for the information of future generations.

A letter, mailed to each person in the immediate family — my mother's request to maintain a family treasure. Her elegant request for funding was a ruse. She later announced that she had already paid for the rebinding herself. The letter, she said, was just to let people know and to make them feel a bit responsible for passing the Bible down to the children in the family. Only the family elders, my mother and her sister, can read the Swedish in the Bible now. The family history, however, has been recorded in English, a treasure indeed for the family's children. A treasure brought to the attention of the whole family through my mother's written act of gentle persuasion. A treasure rebound.

At the Senior Center

"I volunteered to be recording secretary at the Senior Center."

"Mom, I thought you wanted to be free of responsibility there for a while. You just retired as president. Why did you agree to do this now?"

"No one would do it. The elected secretary wouldn't take any notes. She said she'd only handle correspondence. If I hadn't done it, we'd have no record of decisions we've made."

The usual bickering at the Senior Center. Everyone wants things done; no one wants to do them. The refusals, the compensations. My mother, caught between the group's need for permanent records and her own desire for more free time. The outcome was never in doubt. Ever the organizer and manager, she volunteered. She managed the task with a tape recorder, taping and taking notes during meetings. Later, at home, listening over and over again to the tape, she typed up each meeting's minutes, her words reconstructing fleeting moments, capturing them permanently on the page.

Easter Candy Days

My mother is a chocolate pusher. Fund-raising for the Lutheran Church Women at her small, rural church, she single-handedly cajoles, wheedles, and embarrasses the townsfolk into buying thousands of dollars' worth of Easter candy. Her dining room table, rarely used for eating, becomes candy headquarters. As the group's treasurer, my mother is in charge of the candy sale paperwork. Along with a few other volunteers, she tabulates the dozens of order forms and places the final order with the candy company. Later, when the candy arrives, its luscious smell filling the downstairs of her house, the committee sorts the orders. The bulk of the order is from my mother's customers. She counts, matching fudgy chocolate eggs and white chocolate rabbits and colorful jellybeans with individual order forms, complaining all the while about "what a mess my dining room is," but enjoying it just the same.

Then the money, in a blizzard of envelopes on her dining room table. Again matched against order forms and against lists, indicating a dollar high there, a dollar short somewhere else. Finally, sometime near Memorial Day, the accounts are cleared. She submits her report to the Lutheran Church Women. Another banner year; the profits officially recorded by my mother in preparation for next year's effort.

Prelude to Christmas

The congregation of Hessel Valley Lutheran Church, Chandlers Valley, invites you to attend their annual "Prelude to Christmas" concert on Sunday, December 1 at 3:30 p.m. This year, the program features harpist Robin Roys and flutist Sylvia Mack. A time for fellowship and light refreshments will follow the program in the church undercroft.

Writing: Hows and Whys

My mother — organizer, contact person, and writer of press releases for the local paper. Working on the old, manual Smith Corona now kept in my brother's former bedroom, she produces the press releases and a master copy, for later mailing to thirty-two area churches for inclusion in their bulletins. Earlier she has exchanged correspondence and spoken with Robin Roys, gathering information for the "Prelude to Christmas" program which will be handed out to every attendee. Other performers, local talents, are added to the program, as she makes contacts, arranges, changes, and orders their appearances for the first Sunday in December.

"Prelude to Christmas," the official start of the Christmas holiday in the small, northern farm towns in Warren County. My mother and her writing, at the very center of it.

My mother's wordcraft has been hidden by its very obviousness. More vigorous today than before her retirement, she tabulates, records, and urges to action with her writing. Functioning in the public eye, her words get things done. A family Bible rebound. Minutes recorded. Candy sold and delivered. Holiday programs designed, advertised, and attended. Mechanically perfect, oriented for multiple readers, accurate, and persuasive — my mother's public literacy. So public that usually she, as writer, escapes both notice and credit for the events she sets in motion.

Discovering a Writing Father
January 1981

JOE BYHAM. 21 MILES. RUSSELL. 18 JANUARY 1981

LUCY EVANS. 50 MILES. CORRY. 25 JANUARY 1981

JANET MCKEEVER. 13 MILES. JAMESTOWN ROAD, SUGAR GROVE. 30 JANUARY 1981

I find these milage slips in August 1997. My father had submitted them to the county coroner for travel reimbursement. The final accounting of three people's lives. Sixteen years after the dates on the slips, six years after my father's own death, I open a sheaf of papers, clipped together so long ago a rusty imprint marks the top page.

My father's right-leaning, caps-only printing fills four pages, torn from a pocket size spiral notebook he carries with him on coroner's calls. Four small pages — clinical, but eloquent in their tragedy.

Everyday Wordcraft

They read:

> *JOE BYHAM. MALE. 6'1". 195 POUNDS. AGE: 53. PRONOUNCED DEAD AT 2:53 AM. 18 JANUARY 1981. SITE: BYHAM HOME, 147 PRENDERGAST ROAD, RUSSELL. SINGLE GUNSHOT WOUND TO HEAD; .22 CALIBER BULLET. ENTRANCE: LOWER RIGHT JAW. EXIT: UPPER LEFT CRANIAL LOBE.*

More medical terminology follows, ghoulishly explicit, detailing the bullet's deadly trajectory through Joe Byham's brain. The language startles me. My father knew these expressions, could note them with such matter-of-fact ease.

His notes continue:

> *DECEASED IN SITTING POSITION ON SOFA IN BASEMENT FAMILY ROOM. RIFLE ON SOFA AT DECEASED'S LEFT. CRANIAL DEBRIS EXTENSIVE ON WALL AND CEILING BEHIND DECEASED.*

I skim further. Other phrases, *MEDICATION FOR DEPRESSION, ALONE AT T.O.D., DISCOVERED BY WIFE* leap from the spiral notebook pages. I set them down, pondering this scene and my father's thorough, but telegraphic recording of it.

CONFIDENTIAL in bold, black marker is scrawled across an envelope addressed to my father. It lies underneath the spiral notebook pages. I open it and gasp, dropping the contents. Instantly, *the deceased* becomes Joe Byham again, as two photographs slip down on the floor. The police photographer attended proceedings on 18 January 1981.

Joe Byham wore a plaid, flannel shirt and bluejeans for his suicide. His graying hair was curly. He was balding in the front. The flowered sofa occupied a corner of a wood-paneled basement room. Nothing remarkable about the room, the furniture, or the man, except for what the photograph showed. Sitting at the far left end of the flowered sofa, Joe pulled the trigger.

Even in the black and white photos, the gore is clearly visible — spattered on walls, on the sofa, and on Joe Byham himself. Blood pools on the sofa cushion and at Joe Byham's feet. The reason for *CONFIDENTIAL* on the envelope is clear. This envelope is for the deputy coroner's eyes only, and not, by any chance, for others in his family. I think about the Deputy Coroner sign that hung in the car on the sun visor, to be used for just such instances. Passage through "Do Not Cross" police tape; entrance to sites where grief-stricken relatives hovered helplessly while authorities took over. Sixteen years later I relive, in horror, the scene in Joe Byham's basement. My father's work that night, recorded so efficiently on four small notebook pages.

After leaving the scene, my father went to the old, manual Smith Corona to type his report. He prided himself on his typing skills. No secretary ever worked at his funeral home; nor did my mother do typing for him. Correspondence, obituaries, and billings came firsthand from my father.

Six single-spaced pages emerge from those four pocket size notebook pages and two photographs. Still clinical and efficient, the report relays its chilling message, but this permutation of Joe Byham's death extends outside that basement room. This official report to the county coroner includes interviews with family members, contact with a doctor who treated Joe Byham over the last year, and information from his employer. Despite prose expunged of feeling, *the deceased* becomes a person again, a husband, a patient, an employee. Through his words, my father weaves together Joe Byham's living and his dying.

> *JOE BYHAM WAS DISCOVERED BY CLAIRE BYHAM, WIFE OF THE DECEASED. SHE RETURNED FROM HER 3 - 11 SHIFT AT LORAN PLASTICS AT 1:30 AM., AFTER WORKING TWO HOURS ' OVERTIME. GOING DOWNSTAIRS TO TURN OFF A LIGHT, SHE FOUND HER HUSBAND. MRS. BYHAM PHONED THE AMBULANCE IMMEDIATELY.*

> *DR. AARON KENNEDY, A LOCAL PSYCHIATRIST, REPORTED MR. BYHAM SUFFERED FROM DEPRESSION. LATE IN NOVEMBER HE BEGAN TAKING TRANXENE FOR ANXIETY ATTACKS. THANKSGIVING, CHRISTMAS, AND THE LOSS OF HIS JOB DEEPENED HIS DEPRESSION.*

> *BYHAM'S MOST RECENT EMPLOYER, JERRY ALLEN OF S & G WELDING, REPORTED THAT HE DIDN'T WANT TO LET BYHAM GO. A BUSINESS SLOWDOWN FORCED LAYOFFS. BYHAM HAD CALLED MR. ALLEN THE WEEK OF 10 JANUARY ABOUT BEING RECALLED TO WORK. NO RECALLS WERE PLANNED.*

Writing: Hows and Whys

My father's words create a careful balance between death and life. Details about the gun, the bullet, and the physical damage which extinguished Joe Byham's life continue for four typed pages. My father has mastered the jargon of pathologists and police officers. With macabre elegance the medical story of Joe Byham's death unfolds.

On the final two pages, in understated, neutral-as-possible terms, my father then reconstructs Joe Byham's life. Husband of Claire, patient of Aaron Kennedy, former employee of welder, Jerry Allen, depressed over a lost job. My father builds the case for suicide — no foul play involved, no natural causes. Joe Byham died at his own hand.

> *JOE BYHAM. 21 MILES. RUSSELL. 18 JANUARY 1981.*

His final accounting, a pay stub. 21 miles at 20 cents per mile, $4.20. And $25 for the coroner's call itself. Joe Byham. Twenty-nine dollars and twenty cents in a paycheck to my father.

In opening my father's envelope, I had, for the first time, learned of the details of my father's work. In doing so, I discovered, not a coroner, but a father I had never known. My father — the writer. He never spoke of the intricate dances he did with words. Of the textbook perfection of his technical writing. Of this report, or others like it — purposeful, concise, clear, explanatory, grammatically perfect. Written, not for lay readers, but with appropriate terminology for the medical and police department readers who would file Joe Byham at the county court house. Simultaneously sterilizing and humanizing as he wrote, my father translated the lurid scenes of his work.

Thoughts of a Daughter Who Writes

In my family's eyes, I am the writer, the one who has been published. Neither my mother nor my father considered themselves writers. My father, the funeral director and deputy coroner, repeated sixth grade and, as a result, felt alienated from education all of his life. My mother, the secretary and bank teller, took jobs that accommodated her family rather than those in which she would have been promoted; now in retirement she uses her administrative talents in her volunteer work. My parents' ordinary work histories, however, belie the expertise they needed, particularly with the written word, in order to accomplish their daily routines. They were, in fact, writers.

That realization casts my own writing in a new light. My parents fearlessly walked out into the world with their words. Sometimes anonymous, sometimes not, their writing was, and for my mother still is, public, open to immediate criticism or accolade by readers. Further, their public writing got things done. Obituaries, coroner's reports, Senior Center minutes, news releases, order forms. These documents — completed under constraints of time, completed without any option not to publish them — represent their fluency with words.

My words, too, walk out in public. Each syllabus, each handout, each committee report also gets things done. But my other writing, pieces I write by choice and not for my everyday work, leave my desk only at my discretion. Unlike my parents, I can choose how I represent myself as writer. For them, those choices were not possible.

My parents' writing has been both legacy and gift to me. Their legacy — that my daily work too, walks out in public. Their gift, that I may choose what else does. In a university setting, where scholarly publication is expected, it is easy to overlook the everyday wordcraft of those close to us. I marvel, now, at my parents, at the power, honesty, and courage of their literacies. As I watch my mother, 75 years old and still active in her writing world, I am increasingly cognizant of both of my parents' accomplishments as writers. Of their intricate dances with words.

Note: While the events described in my father's coroner's file are real, names and some details have been changed here in order to protect identities.

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Helen Collins Sitler is a Teacher Consultant with the Southcentral Pennsylvania Writing Project. She teaches writing at the Armstrong County Campus of Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Grammar ... Again

BY EDWIN EPPS

Here I go one more time. Originally I hesitated to write about what to do with traditional grammar in the writing classroom. After all most teachers have very strong feelings one way or another about textbook grammar, and it is extremely unlikely that one short discussion like this will change anyone's mind on the subject. Then, too, over the years I have presented countless workshops on grammar and writing, locally and regionally, and I have written on the topic before (Epps, 1990); as a result, I am suffering something like grammatical burnout. Still, wherever I go, teachers, parents, and administrators all have deeply sincere concerns about grammar, and all too seldom is there anyone around to deal with the issues directly and frankly. So it may be time again to shed some light where there is all too much heat.

What Is Grammar?

First, what do I mean by grammar? In the most descriptive phrase I have been able to come up with in the last five years or so, grammar as I use the term here means traditional schoolbook grammar with its emphasis upon parsing, sentence diagramming, and the identification of "parts of speech" and "parts of a sentence" according to a system of nomenclature derived ultimately from Latin grammars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What I explicitly exclude from grammar in this sense are standards and levels of usage ("feel bad" versus "feel badly," for example, or a preference for "This is she" over "This is her" or the condemnation of expressions like "He ain't"); style (Does one or does one not end a sentence with a preposition?); spelling; diction; the "mechanics" of capitalization and punctuation; and the research paper. All of these topics typically appear in so-called "grammar" textbooks and, like grammar, they are related to the teaching of writing; but they are most emphatically not "grammar," and they are therefore beyond my principal focus here. Much of the confusion and not a little of the heated controversy surrounding the issue of grammar instruction, especially in the minds of parents and administrators, originates in the obfuscation of true grammatical issues by red herring issues such as usage and style. Constance Weaver, in fact, delineates five distinct senses of the term grammar, all in current usage (Weaver, 1979, p. 9).

Is There a Grammar-Writing Connection?

That said, allow me to present my topic of discussion in the following terms: Does a knowledge of traditional textbook grammar—the nomenclature kind of grammar that teaches definitions of "transitive verbs" and "predicate nominatives" and fosters sentence diagramming and the conjugation of verbs—facilitate or improve a student's competence as a writer?

Without a doubt the real-world answer is no. Think about it: How many students have you taught in your own career who were capable of making A's on all of your grammar tests but couldn't write their way out of a paper bag? Conversely, how many truly excellent writers have you taught who had no idea whatsoever of what a direct object is or where to find one or how to identify one, all this in spite of five or eight or ten years of instruction in traditional grammar by often gifted teachers? Instinctively there is—or should be—a sense that there is little if any correlation between mastery of traditional grammar and competence as a writer.

Research demonstrates the validity of this gut feeling about the relationship between grammar and writing; in fact research goes even further to assert that there is no positive correlation between grammar mastery and writing ability and that time spent on grammar drill and practice is in some ways counterproductive since it is time taken away from writing instruction.

Let me be specific. In 1986 the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills in conjunction with the National Conference on Research in English published George Hillocks's major study, *Research on Written Composition: New Directions for Teaching.* In this work Hillocks reported the conclusions of his meta-analysis of the effectiveness of various approaches to the teaching of writing. Of all methods of instruction in composition, Hillocks found that traditional textbook grammar was the least effective:

> *The study of traditional school grammar (i.e., the definition of parts of speech, the parsing of sentences, etc.) has no effect on raising the quality of student writing. Every other focus of instruction examined in this review is stronger. Taught in certain ways, grammar and mechanics instruction has a deleterious effect on student writing. In some instances a heavy emphasis on mechanics and usage (e.g., marking every error) resulted in significant losses in overall quality.* (p. 248)

As strong as Hillocks's conclusions are, they are neither isolated nor new. Constance Weaver, for example, in *Grammar for Teachers: Perspectives and Definitions,* an important 1979 study widely disseminated by the National Council of Teachers of

English, observed that "the results from tests in grammar, composition, and literary interpretation led to the conclusion that there was little or no relationship between grammar and composition or between grammar and literary interpretation" (p. 4) and, in slightly different terms, "a considerable body of research and the testimony of innumerable students suggest that studying grammar doesn't help people read or write better (or, for that matter, listen or speak better either)" (p. 4). Several books for teachers later, Weaver's conclusions remain the same today:

> *...in general, the teaching of grammar does not serve any practical purpose for most students. It does not improve reading, speaking, writing, or even editing, for the majority of students....*(Weaver 1998, p. 19)

Elizabeth Haynes reported similar findings in her January 1978 review of research for *English Journal:* "the report of the Dartmouth Conference ... (1967) stated that the clearest agreement was that the study of traditional grammar had no effect (or even a harmful effect) on the improvement of written composition" (p. 83). Accordingly, she concluded as one of her "best recommendations":

> *While traditional grammar may be included in the curriculum as a humane and interesting discipline, or as a body of knowledge worthy of study, it should not be taught as an aid to writing. (p. 86)*

Johnson and Louis (1990) come to similar conclusions. Why doesn't grammar work as an effective means of developing writing competence? In their view, "The teaching of grammar necessarily involves the decontextualization of language" (p. 5). In other words, when grammar is taught through isolated drill exercises, apart from genuine communication, i.e., real writing for real purposes, there is no student ownership of the lessons, if any, learned. It just does not "take." If this is true of mainstream speakers of Standard American English (whatever that is), moreover, it is even truer of non-mainstream students.

Farr and Daniels (1986) observe,

> *There is no reason that an approach to writing that has failed with mainstream students should be made the center of the curriculum for non-mainstream students [as it often is], unless we have conclusive evidence that it will work.* (p. 44)

An influential review of best practice in the English Language Arts classroom underscores what experienced teachers have been saying for years: "Grammar and mechanics are best learned in the context of actual writing" (Zemelman et al. 1993, p. 52).

Not only does there seem to be no connection between the study of formal grammar and compositional competence, but there is also some evidence that mastery of complex, Latin-based school grammar is developmentally beyond teachers' reasonable expectations for at least some of their students. Most recently Hudson (1987) reported that "When students have achieved a level of formal reasoning [in Piagetian terms], they are much more likely to understand the rules and nuances of abstract grammar tasks" (p. 83).

Other writers agree. J. N. Hook and William H. Evans, in their influential text *The Teaching of High School English,* answer the question, "How much grammar—especially how much syntax—should be taught to junior and senior high school students who are native speakers of English?" with the pithily pointed "Not much" (Hook & Evans, 1986, p. 248). Dan Kirby and Tom Liner concur. In *Inside Out,* one of the most widely accepted classroom resources for teachers of writing published in recent years, Kirby and Liner argue that "Traditional grammar instruction—labeling parts of speech, identifying forms—is of little value in most courses" (Kirby & Liner, 1988, p. 258). More academic studies reach similar conclusions. David Foster notes,

> *The plain fact is that even aside from the arguments-on-principle suggested earlier in this chapter, no convincing empirical evidence has shown any link between knowing grammar—traditional or transformational—and writing well.* (Foster, 1983, p. 132)

And Arthur Applebee, in an important historical survey of the teaching of English, refers with approbation to "the old and well-documented evidence that grammatical knowledge has no demonstrable relationship to writing ability" (Applebee, 1974, pp. 249-250).

The case against traditional grammar is strong indeed, ...(yet) it continues to be taught and often with a real vengeance.

Why Do We Teach Grammar?

The case against traditional grammar is strong indeed. As we all know, however, it continues to be taught and often with a real vengeance. Why is this? I think there are

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many answers to this question, but let me posit four explicitly.

In the first place, most grammarian English teachers teach grammar because they know it, they are good at it, and they enjoy teaching it. Rare indeed is the English teacher who does not like grammar yet teaches it enthusiastically. Yet non-grammarian English teachers frequently feel in the depths of their professional hearts as if they should like grammar, and I am often approached after workshop or conference presentations by such teachers wanting an extra dose of cordial against the guilt they feel. This I happily supply since I am convinced that simply liking a subject or a topic is not in and of itself sufficient reason for teaching it.

Grammar instruction is so widespread because it is so easy to teach.

Second, many grammarian English teachers teach traditional grammar because they were taught it in school. Past experience and models are most often the bases of current behavior, so we should not be surprised to find our colleagues, even ourselves, perpetuating the school of their own experience. Given the inherently inertial response of most schools to change of any sort, it is small wonder that English methods have changed little in many places from what they were decades ago.

A third reason that grammatical instruction is so widespread is that it is so easy to teach, at least as most often practiced in the classroom. Consider: the teacher assigns a topic, a couple of pages of explanation from the text, and an exercise or two for practice; reviews definitions orally the next day and then goes over homework sentences orally or at the board; perhaps spends additional time on concepts students find especially troublesome (the subjunctive mood, say, or predicate nominatives); and then assigns a test. The ease of this pedagogical approach, of course, is hardly the same as ease of mastering the concept, and this is perhaps why so many students have been deadened to the joys of the English curriculum after eight or twelve years consigned to this lowest level of instructional hell.

A final reason for the widespread teaching of grammar is that parents and administrators expect it. After all, they were taught this way, and grammar was good enough for them, wasn't it? All too often, of course, it wasn't. Too many people remember their English classes as an exercise in little more than character building precisely because of our profession's blind faith adherence to a ruggedly ineffectual pretense of teaching writing (or "correct speech" or "good English" or whatever we thought it was) through grammar. One reason the problem continues is that so few good English teachers become principals or instructional leaders.

So what are we to do about the teaching of grammar? Continue as before, chuck it entirely, or arrive at some middle ground that will satisfy both camps?

I'm not sure the third alternative is realistically achievable, but I believe in something like it. Most important of all, I think, is the need to draw a distinction between a grammar which is of pedagogical use to the teacher and a grammar which is the content taught to students. Hook & Evans (1986) state the issue in these terms:

> *...The basic reason for offering some instruction in grammar is that it shows how the English sentence works—how the parts cooperate with each other to assist us in the expression of meaning.*
>
> *For this purpose we need not traditional, structural, transformational, or some other conventionally recognized grammar, but a pedagogical grammar. This is one that selects from the welter of theories and terms just those few that will help ordinary students (few of whom will become linguists) to understand the basic characteristics of the most powerful tool they are likely to own, their language.*
>
> *What this pedagogical grammar ought to do is to stress and clarify the systematic nature of the English sentence...* (p. 249)

Expressed differently, what Hook & Evans are saying is what has been stated more succinctly by Kirby & Liner (1988): "Our diagnosis of students' writing problems should be informed by our knowledge of linguistics" (p. 259). As teachers we need to have a formal understanding of the syntax of English grammar in order to identify and then help to rectify our students' shortcomings as writers, in other words. Beyond this, we need "some common vocabulary for discussing sentence elements" (Foster, 1983, p. 133); Foster suggests perhaps traditional grammar for "the elements of syntax" (clause, phrase, subject, conjunction, etc.) and transformational grammar for "the operations students must work with" upon these sentences (p. 133). This makes sense to me, but I hasten to add that what I am recommending is that students learn just

enough terminology to be of genuine service to them. I do not think that most students—or any except those who show a liking for the exercise—should diagram sentences; I do not think that conjugating verbs affects students' writing ability; and I especially do not think that whole class instruction and/or drill in textbook grammar is good for much of anything.

Weaver (1979) provides a useful set of recommendations for the classroom teacher:

> *In short, grammatical knowledge is more useful to teachers than to students. Teachers with some explicit knowledge of grammar should be able to design, select, and sequence a variety of sentence-combining activities. Students who have had considerable amount [sic] of practice with such activities tend to show improved control of sentence structure in their free writing, an increased ability to write syntactically mature sentences. There is some evidence that such practice may also improve reading comprehension. But before incorporating such exercises into the English language arts curriculum, teachers need to make such decisions as (1) which kinds of exercises are appropriate for the students' level of development; (2) whether such exercises should cover a variety of syntactic constructions or only a few; (3) whether the sentence combining should be done apart from normal writing, in conjunction with it, or both; (4) whether such exercises should be written or oral or both; (5) whether such exercises should be structured, unstructured, or both; (6) and whether to use technical terminology in the exercises or whether to teach mainly by example.*
>
> *One important point is that grammar needs to be combined with rhetoric; that is, students need not only to practice ways of combining sentences but to discuss which ways are more effective and why...* (pp. 86-87)

Another well reasoned argument on why to teach grammar, what about it to teach, and how to go about it all is provided by Noguchi (1991), who offers a "writer's grammar" which students can profitably apply to stylistic problems.

Of course as we address the essence of what we and our students really need grammatically, we should not in the process neglect the teaching of the conventions of writing. Atwell points out that "Teachers need to remember that conventions were invented by writers, not handed down by God or English teachers" (1998). She then goes on to remind us all that

> *Throughout history writers developed rules and forms so others would read their writing as they intended it to be read. We do our students a big favor by approaching rules and forms not as minutiae to be mastered, but as a means of helping them make their writing look and sound as they wish it to and in order that readers will engage with a text and take it seriously.* (pp. 184—185)

Of What Use Is Grammar?

So what do we do on Monday morning? And Tuesday through Friday? If we are teaching writing, then our first job is to have the kids write. Students need to develop fluency as writers so that they will be willing to write with the kind of frequency required for improvement to take place: if you don't write, you can't become any better at it. Next we need to have students write meaningfully for real purposes and real audiences. When it matters to students who they are writing for, about what, and why, then it suddenly becomes easier to teach them the importance of form and correctness. Once they understand this importance, they are more likely to internalize lessons of correctness taught within the context of real writing. Students also need opportunities to learn from one another and from the teacher in group and paired conferences. In the real world the writer who works in isolation, without feedback, help, and encouragement, is a rare bird indeed: the newsroom of a big city daily can be the noisiest of places for precisely this reason.

Students make mistakes for reasons, they do it systematically, and they do it often.

When focusing upon specific student errors, teachers should be selective, not exhaustive. Students make mistakes for reasons, they do it systematically, and they do it often. Take time to learn the kinds of errors made by individual students and then help those students individually. When groups of students make a common error, teach the concept at stake in a mini-lesson (Atwell, 1998), but still reserve most of your effort for individual attention within the context of a student's own writing (Rief, 1992).

What kinds of specific lessons and/or activities are most likely to reinforce and

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strengthen a student's "grammar sense"? Tchudi and Tchudi (1991) suggest a variety in addition to the sentence-combining recommended above. Most of the Tchudis' recommended activities focus upon language and dialect awareness: having students become familiar with the nature of language and with the characteristics of their own and their classmates' (pp. 175-178). Other of their suggestions focus upon more traditional grammar topics but, as they point out, "separated from the felt need to change people's language behavior" (p. 166). Among their engaging activities: using Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" as a means of exploring what students already know about parts of speech and syntax; teaching parts of speech "independently of rules of usage" so as to avoid overkill; teaching nomenclature and identification of grammatical terms via non-textbook materials, for example, newspapers, school memos, etc.; utilizing substitution frames in order to teach parts of speech via positions within the sentence, etc. (pp. 166-169). Hook and Evans (1986) also discuss "The Basic Patterns of the English Sentence" and strategies to teach them at some length (pp. 250-256); and they provide a most helpful presentation of what they call "The Most Persistent Errors in Syntax" (for example, sentence fragments and run-ons, faulty subordination, dangling modifiers, faulty parallelism, etc.) and ways to combat them (pp. 261-266).

The problems of minority students and nonstandard English speaking students—primarily problems created by the schools' inadequacy in addressing multiple English dialects and by the imposition of political expectations upon the English curriculum—present a special class of instructional perplexities for many teachers. It is beyond the scope of our ability to deal with those here, but there are a number of admirable studies which do so. See, for example, the classic study by J.L. Dillard (1973) as well as Dandy (1991) and Taylor (1990).

I am not prepared to go much beyond this, although like most English teachers I have to admit that I *have* in the past gone much beyond this point. Best practice to me now, however, seems to be to have students learn to write by writing; to teach students just enough rudimentary terminology to establish a common ground specifically for the purpose of discussing real problems in the students' own writing (and some teachers can do this without much more than "sentence," "paragraph," "noun," and "verb"); and to reserve any formal study of textbook grammar—traditional, transformational, structural, or whatever—to the precincts of an elective course relatively late in a student's high school career. The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association have together developed a comprehensive and practical guide to the teaching of English Language Arts in Standards for the English Language Arts (1996). The approach recommended here and the philosophy which underlies it are both fully informed by a complete and reliable understanding of the nature of language and language acquisition. Those looking for more guidance across the entire spectrum of Language Arts education would do well to begin here and in the works listed in "Appendix E: Resources for Teachers" (pp. 119-130).

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Edwin Epps, Ed.D., is co-director of the Spartanburg Writing project. He teaches at McCracken Junior High School and the University of South Carolina, both in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Teaching Grammar in Context: One Approach

BY HARRIET WILLIAMS

Beyond Basic

If reluctant writers have been in a writing workshop for any length of time, they can usually name two of the key qualities of good writing—focus and development. Unfortunately, sometimes even when they know the focus they want their piece to have, they find it difficult to express that focus clearly if they don't have a command of sentence formations beyond the simple sentence.

For example, it's not unusual for a basic writer to compose a passage like this one from Amber, a 17-year-old. In her piece about date rape, Amber is attempting to focus on a girl's acceptance of a ride home from a party with an acquaintance, but her choppy sentence structure not only makes the piece irritating for a reader, it also diffuses her focus. Here's a sample passage

> *The girl was a freshman. She was naive. Her name was Sylvia. She accepted a ride home from a party with a friend of a friend.*

Novice writers also have difficulty with development. Even when response groups or their own developing instincts tell them they need to add information, they frequently tend to devote an entire sentence to each added detail. In the following sentence Billy, a secondary remedial writer, attempts to apply the advice of group members who have told him he needed to add a location to his original sentence from a history paper:

> *The battle of Chattanooga was fought on Lookout Mountain. The battle sealed the South's doom.*

Billy felt his history teacher would be pleased with the addition of the first of these sentences which identifies the "where" of the battle, but he was still not comfortable enough with grammatical constructions to incorporate that information into his original sentence. Instead, by writing the sentence separately, he loses in focus what he gained in specific detail.

How can an understanding of grammar help students such as these write richer and more focused prose? None of the students in the remedial class with which I was working felt they had a strong command of sentence structure. They put their heads down when they heard "participial phrase" or "appositive," yet those structures were just what their writing needed if they were to add detail while maintaining their

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original focus. A brief series of lessons (two class periods) designed to help these students incorporate certain grammatical structures into early drafts of their own writing yielded immediate improvements in their work.

I've used the same lesson with fifth, tenth, and twelfth graders and with college freshmen. All responded positively. Their first step was to bring with them an early draft of something they were writing, whether for English or for any other class.

My first step was to identify four grammatical constructions to teach the students: the appositive; the present participial phrase; the complex sentence structures using the who, that, whose clause; and the subordinating clause. We worked with the following subordinators: *although, even though, when, if, because, since, due to, after, before* and *unless.* Why did I choose only these constructions and only those subordinators? Because they all help accomplish the same rhetorical purpose of adding information while keeping the sentence itself focused on its subject.

Next I introduced each grammatical structure by giving the students short sentence combining exercises (often made up on the spot using the students' own names and information about them for the sentences). I then guided them into writing the structures before we named and defined them. For example, I put the following on the board for one secondary group after gathering some information about them:

> *Jessica works at Coconuts Records.*
> *Jessica is 16.*

The students combined this information into one sentence. When someone came up with "Jessica, 16, works at Coconuts Records," we were able to use this as a model to define the appositive. When someone said, "Jessica, who works at Coconuts Records, is 16," we defined the relative clause. This pair of sentence examples also made it easy to explain how the focus of the sentence changes depending on which structure a writer chooses. In the same manner, students were always able to produce orally samples of the complex sentence constructions while I captured their words on the board or overhead projector.

The next step was the crucial one. Armed with their new awareness of grammatical forms, their drafts, and response-group feedback as to where their readers needed extra information, they were instructed to revise, choosing one of the structures we had just practiced. They could combine two sentences already there, or they could add new information.

All students composed at least one sentence to improve their drafts, and the average number of revisions was two combined or improved sentences. Some students' revisions made dramatic improvements, either in focus, development, or both. For instance, Amber added the present participial phrase below to her previous sentence from the date rape essay:

> *The naive sixteen-year-old, wearing khaki pants and an oxford shirt, accepted an offer of a ride home from a guy she had just met.*

Amber saw readily that she could defuse criticism of her character by adding the details of her non-seductive outfit, but she also knew she wanted the focus of the sentence to stay on the girl's action. This sentence accomplishes both.

Billy's choppy version of his history term paper became, "The battle of Chattanooga, fought on Lookout Mountain, sealed the South's doom."

Reggie, a senior, was writing a piece about how the arrival of a Down's Syndrome child affects family and friends (occasioned by the birth of a Down's Syndrome child in his best friend's family). Originally, he had written a sentence which his response group did not understand:

Doctors are the first to traumatize new parents.

His revision that incorporated an anecdote he had picked up from his friend, made impressive use of the "who" clause:

> *Doctors who rudely announce the presence of Down's Syndrome with remarks such as, "She'll probably die soon anyway," are the first to traumatize new parents.*

It has never been my aim that students be able to identify and define grammatical structures in others' writing; instead, my goal has been to see novice writers learn to produce prose that is fully developed, yet more focused. This lesson is a reasonable place to start to make that happen. It is also an example of what Hook and Evans (1986) call a "pedagogical grammar": a grammar which enables the teacher to turn linguistic features of the language into tools to improve the competence of student writers.

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Harriet Williams is director of the Santee-Wateree Writing Project.

SmartBoards and Other Smart Solutions to Computer Access

BY PATRICIA FITZSIMMONS-HUNTER AND CHARLES MORAN

Technological Access: Polar Views

It is clear that access to emerging technologies is a function of wealth, which is itself a function of the situation into which you happen to be born: your country, class, race, and gender. The more resources at your disposal, the more likely you are to have a desk and technology on or near that desk.

In the U.S. literature of technology studies, however, the issue of access is treated in two different and unproductive ways: it is ignored, or it becomes the occasion for a diatribe against the unequal distribution of wealth in this country. For us, the literature that ignores the fact of differential access falls into the category established by Hawisher and Selfe (57) as the "rhetoric of technology." Hawisher and Selfe critique this literature for its assumption that technological change will produce hoped-for benefits. We want to critique this literature for its companion assumption: that the unequal distribution of technology is not important, or if it is important it will somehow take care of itself. For examples of this rhetoric in relatively pure form, see the September 1995 issue of *Scientific American*, titled "Key Technologies for the 21st Century," in which it is assumed throughout that everyone will have equal access to, and benefits from, the technological revolutions that are now in progress. For examples of this rhetoric in the field of computers and writing, see, for example, Bolter, Landow, Moran, and Tuman.

The literature that focuses on the fact of differential access—and there is not much of it—embodies the rhetoric of social revolution. This strand of the literature deals with the problem at the macro level: social change is both the end and the means. We are thinking here of C. Paul Olson's "Who Computes?" Richard Ohmann's "Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capital," and to a lesser degree, Helen Schwartz's "Ethical Considerations of Educational Computer Use." In this strand of the literature, the fact that access to hardware/software is a function of wealth permits only one solution: a massive redistribution of wealth. Until such redistribution occurs, this literature implies, there is nothing we, as teachers or school administrators, can do. The problem must be solved at the macro level; in our daily work-lives, we can only wait.

The difficulty with both of these approaches is that they overlook and thereby disable the human beings involved. Both have in them more than a suspicion of technological determinism: the rhetoric of technology assumes that somehow technology will itself solve the problem of its own distribution, and the rhetoric of social revolution assumes that without the redistribution of wealth/technology across our society, the technologically rich will vault still further beyond the technologically poor and there is nothing that anyone can do to halt this process except actively call for the revolution.

Another Way: Students and Teachers as Agents of Change

As teachers ourselves and as people engaged in kindergarten through college staff development, we are driven to suggest an alternative to these two approaches, one that accounts for the ability of human beings to shape their own lives and to cope on their own with the inequities they find in their particular situations. With more than a slight debt to the vision of Paulo Freire, we call our approach "the rhetoric of enablement-through-technology." In this approach we begin with these assumptions: that instead of starting with technology, we start with people; and that we consider as our goal the integration of low-end, relatively affordable technology into the lives and work of those who are, or see themselves as being left behind by the pace of technological change: "roadkill," to use a popular contemporary metaphor, on the information highway.

We do not want to be misunderstood. We are not at all trying to discover a via media, a compromise or middle way between two unproductive positions. And we are not suggesting for a moment that we accept as inevitable the widening gap between this country's rich and its poor. What we are suggesting is that if given the most modest of opportunities, students and teachers can themselves be agents of change; by initiating change in their own situations, they can begin the work of institutional change in their own classrooms. Their example will provide other teachers with models and school administrators with functioning programs to support. As teachers become able to articulate clearly what they need in the way of technology to attain their goals for their students' learning, they will present their schools and school systems with concrete plans and programs to fund and support— not simply the abstract goal of a "computer in every pot," but specific educational programs that require the use of technology for their full implementation.

In the sections that follow, we report on a collaborative staff-development project in which two technology-poor institutions, the Springfield Public Schools and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, together permitted a group of students

and teachers to empower themselves through technology.

A New Definition

Embedded in our report is a new definition of the term *access*. Institutions and organizations most often define access as the ratio between people/users and computers. Seen in this way, both of us teach in institutions that could be seen as technologically disadvantaged; relative to our counterparts in wealthier institutions in our region, our students have, per capita, fewer computers and more difficult Internet access. Yet the issue of access, we will argue, cannot be fully or even appropriately defined by numbers of computers per student or computers per classroom. We therefore expand our definition of access to include these factors:

1. Numbers of computers available to students and to teachers;
2. Teachers' and students' perceptions of their access to technology;
3. Teachers' and students' understanding of the ways in which appropriate technology can help them achieve their goals for their own teaching and learning;
4. Teachers' and students' willingness to exploit the technologies available to them; and
5. Teachers' and students' willingness to fight for the technologies that they need to pursue their goals for their own teaching and learning.

In the three staff-development projects we describe below, we made a minimal investment in item one to achieve substantial gains in items two through five. Now, at the end of the projects, we feel convinced that we have, without great expense, dramatically increased the access of Springfield students and teachers to emerging technologies. We have done this by altering teachers' and students, perceptions of their access to technology and by enlarging their understanding of the ways in which technology can help them achieve their teaching and learning goals. Teachers who were, before these projects, inexperienced in the use of emerging technologies have now become advocates for, and exemplars of, the use of these technologies in the curriculum. Similarly, students, as well as their families and caregivers, have become advocates for the use of these technologies. What might have been a technological underclass has become something altogether different: a set of teachers, students, and parents who are more knowledgeable about technology and more able and willing to make compelling arguments to achieve their fair share. In addition, teachers and students together have discovered innovative and effective ways of making the equipment they have go further through innovative ways of sharing and leveraging the equipment that they do have. They have also demanded and achieved access to facilities previously closed to them.

In fiscal year 1996, the Massachusetts Department of Education allocated the Western Massachusetts Writing Project substantial funding to improve the teaching of writing throughout western Massachusetts. As project co-directors, we chose to commit a portion of that funding to exploring the impact of technology on teaching and learning in the Springfield Public Schools. We designed three staff-development projects that would engage teachers in the development of writing curricula that would include technology, specifically, low-end word processors that we made available in small numbers. We wanted to test our new definition of *access*. How would teachers and students react? How would teachers use the time, support and minimal equipment that we provided? We were stepping into the unknown. How, we asked, would this program affect the integration of technology into teaching and learning in the teachers' classes? What difference would the program make in the ways teachers and students used technology? What classroom management issues would we all face? How much equipment is necessary to promote change? With these questions and others in mind, we invited Springfield teachers to help us develop prototypes of effective technology integration into the curriculum. Several different projects emerged.

A Minimal Investment

We made a minimal investment in equipment, buying thirty AlphaSmart Pro Boards, one of a number of commercially available, simple, inexpensive, portable word processors. We purchased the rechargeable battery packs and traveling cases that allowed teachers and students freedom from electrical outlets and computer carrels: the SmartBoards could be transported from classroom to classroom, from school to home. We bought two Macintosh computers and two printers to serve as the downloading and uploading print stations necessary for formatting and printing. This equipment was housed in Springfield for the 1995-1996 school year. The total investment in hardware and software for the projects came to $11,000: $7,000 for the SmartBoards and $4,000 for the computers and printers. We

Writing Projects at Work

budgeted another $40,000 to compensate the participating teachers for the time required to familiarize themselves with the equipment, to plan curriculum units that used this and other equipment available to them, to share and refine these plans collectively, and to reflect together on their own and their students' experiences in the curricula they had designed.

The ratio of money spent on teachers' time and support to money spent on equipment was thus just under 5 to 1. Forty-one teachers, nineteen schools, and 775 students were directly impacted by the projects.

Writing for Publication Seminar

In our first project, the Writing for Publication Seminar, we invited thirty Springfield K-12 teachers from nineteen Springfield schools to participate in a venture that would support the integration of technology into daily classroom practice. Each teacher was challenged to design and execute a ten-week, collaborative classroom project, one that incorporated effective writing process instruction, included successful use of appropriate computer technology, and would result in a published end product. The teachers were exemplary classroom teachers, not computer experts: several had never used computers before, and although a few had access to labs on a limited basis and several had one to five computers in their classrooms, the majority had no access to computer technology up to this point. Even so, interested in the potential of technology as a tool for teaching and learning, the teachers enthusiastically elected to participate.

The seminar provided thirty teacher-participants with one SmartBoard each, signed out to them for the duration of the project. The participants used their SmartBoards differently. Some pooled their resources and rotated, taking six or seven SmartBoards to their students at a time (teachers met at gas stations, restaurants, or homes to facilitate the sharing); others set up an input station in their classrooms (individual students would step out from classroom activities to enter their writing); still others signed the SmartBoards out to their students to take home; others used the boards themselves to enter student data. The creativity and flexibility of the teacher-participants and their students maximized the impact of one word processor per teacher.

The seminar also provided time for the teachers to plan their projects, design project components, set timelines, and meet every two weeks to share news of progress and receive the necessary training. Involvement in the seminar motivated teachers to work hard to improve access to technology in their schools, creatively and cunningly gathering allies in campaigns to gain greater access to more sophisticated and larger numbers of computers. School administrators and other teachers supported the efforts of our participants. A final celebration drew some six hundred people, including the thirty teachers, their students, parents, and community members.

Many of the teacher-participants who reluctantly returned their SmartBoards at the end of the project have since capitalized on their success and persuaded school administrators to give them computers for their classrooms. Three principals and their

school councils have ordered sets of SmartBoards for their schools. Other teacher-participants, thanks to the recognition of the project's impact on regular classroom instruction, have more access to existing computer labs. In addition, student enthusiasm has fostered greater parental involvement. When students employ technology—with enthusiasm—as a tool for learning, parents demand that such technologies become readily available.

We conclude from this project that a well-designed inservice staff-development program can increase teachers' and students' access to technology, not necessarily through the purchase of expensive, high-end equipment, and not necessarily through technology-based teacher-training, but rather by giving teachers resources in the form of planning time, collegial support, and a challenge. The teachers themselves become a resource for us here: as more exemplary teachers enact the integration of technology with curriculum, school systems will build their knowledge base and thus the basis for effective uses of and clearly articulated arguments for the increased availability of technology in schools and classrooms.

Forest Park Project

The Forest Park Project differed from the Writing for Publication Seminar in an important way: In the seminar we gave teachers an assignment: to develop a project that would be published. In the Forest Park Project, we asked the teacher-participants to become our co-researchers, helping us conduct an investigation into the ways in which teachers and their students could use technology to advance students' learning. We gave these teachers no specific assignment, as in the seminar, but we did give them time for planning and reflection, and we did give them access to the SmartBoards and two print-station computers.

Two interdisciplinary teams of eighth-grade teachers in one middle school committed themselves to a semester-long investigation of ways to integrate writing effectively into core-curriculum courses. They agreed to participate in the project with the understanding that they would use writing-as-learning strategies with their students, incorporate writing-process strategies in their assignments, and work as a team to provide consistent expectations and classroom management techniques. The teachers—none of whom was experienced in using computers—would also explore the impact of having twenty SmartBoards in the new writing-as-learning program. In addition to the SmartBoards, which the teachers received at the end of January (after the Writing for Publication Seminar concluded), each team was given one Macintosh computer with CD-ROM and a printer. The teacher teams attended biweekly meetings with Patricia Fitzsimmons-Hunter to discuss writing-as-learning activities and also to receive technology training.

The low cost of the SmartBoards permitted teachers to have many computers in the same classroom. This altered the way in which the technology was used by the students. In a classroom with two or three expensive and powerful computers, students typically compose with pen and paper and then use a computer to input, format, and print their final drafts. In the Forest Park classrooms, each student had a SmartBoard on his or her desk. Students sometimes composed free-written reflections, first-draft responses, or journal entries. Instead of using the computer to print out the finished product, students used the SmartBoards to record their thoughts and reflections in a way that they had not in the past. Access to low-cost word-processors thus engaged students in writing in ways that pen and paper had not. During the project, only one student among the one hundred sixty student-participants preferred pen and paper to the SmartBoard.

The SmartBoards' lack of sophisticated bells and whistles forced students to concentrate on composing, focusing on content rather than format.

Furthermore, as one teacher observed, the apparent limitations of the SmartBoards were in some ways an advantage: their lack of sophisticated bells and whistles forced students to concentrate on composing, focusing on content rather than format. Many of the teachers noticed that some students became distracted on more powerful, high-tech computers, playing with fonts, graphics, and formatting before they had composed and revised their early drafts. With the SmartBoards, composing was foregrounded because sophisticated formatting was not possible.

Teacher-participants also found that the cross-disciplinary use of the SmartBoards fostered important synergies. Because students had access to the SmartBoards in all their courses, they did not need to be

trained to use different technology in each class. Teachers could thus plan to use the SmartBoards with confidence. Likewise, students began to see writing, particularly writing with computers, as an important interdisciplinary activity. As students invented ways of using the technology to facilitate their own learning, teachers, meeting regularly to discuss their work, could pass along to one another the new ways technology helped support the writing-as-learning program.

There were some negative dimensions to such use of technology. For example, teachers reported bottlenecks when printing became necessary. Yet the teachers and students worked to mitigate these, coming to school early and using the print stations before class, staying after school, or using the print stations during lunch. Together, students and teachers developed housekeeping systems for uploading writing onto the print stations and for printing out drafts. They also established a technology folder system in which each student had a folder, containing both paper and diskette, that traveled with them from class to class.

Overall, however, the benefits far outweighed the drawbacks. Teachers became less threatened by their students' expertise on computers. Some who had been reluctant to use existing computer labs in their schools came to delight in and fully exploit their students' technological backgrounds. Teachers created teams of students, each team having one designated *techie* as a leader. Responsibility for computer knowledge was thus decentralized; students and teachers together became learners, pooling and sharing their different expertise. We suspect that because the participating teachers came to value their students' knowledge of computers, they grew more willing to push even further their own exploration of technology as a tool for teaching and learning. The teachers claim to look at their lesson plans differently now, seeing them as sites for the use of emerging technologies. Students look at writing differently, seeing it as an essential interdisciplinary activity that can be enabled and extended by emerging technologies.

When teachers were required to return the SmartBoards and printing stations at the end of the year, some explored other avenues for access to the technology they need. For instance, one teacher has already received a grant that will furnish her classroom with three computers. In the course of the project, teachers worked their way into a formerly closed lab. These teachers are now powerful and already successful advocates for the effective integration of technology with their own curricula.

Lending Project

The Lending Project moved even further toward teacher autonomy. While in the Writing for Publication Seminar we required a finished project and in the Forest Park Project we required research, in the Lending Project we simply created a pool of eight SmartBoards that alumnae of the Writing for Publication project could sign out for a limited time. Unlike the first two projects, the Lending Project gave participating teachers no paid planning or preparation time and no substantial technical support. We were testing the hypothesis that given their initial training in the Writing for Publication Seminar, the teachers would themselves find creative uses for admittedly low-tech equipment.

One teacher used the SmartBoards for a community service learning project at a local nursing home, in which students used the boards to transcribe interviews. Another teacher used the SmartBoards in conjunction with a parent-teacher group to generate promotional brochures and pamphlets celebrating Black History Month. Another teacher borrowed the SmartBoards to support a pen-pal partnership between ninth and second graders in separate district schools. The SmartBoards have also been lent out for record keeping and grant writing. We conclude from the Lending Project that staff-development programs such as the Writing for Publication project can have long-term effects if followed up by additional opportunities to build on earlier experiences.

Train the Trainers: Technology Share Fair

Based on the success of the Writing for Publication Seminar, the Western Massachusetts Writing Project and the Springfield Public Schools applied to the Massachusetts Department of Education for funds to support a "Train the Trainers" program, one designed to disseminate the Writing for Publication Seminar throughout the state as an exemplary staff-development program. Funding was granted, and the Train the Trainers program became a reality. We chose as participants eighteen teachers from the Writing for Publication project. The work began in April 1996 and was completed in June.

The Train the Trainers project was much like the Writing for Publication project in that the participants had a task to accomplish: in this case, the development of

inservice workshops for teachers in Springfield and other western Massachusetts schools. As in the Writing for Publication project, the grant included funds for release, so that teachers could work to develop their projects alone or in teams and share their work with others. The grant also included funds for minimal technology: eighteen SmartBoards, one for each participant. The ratio of money spent on time to monies spent on equipment was 4 to 1, slightly lower than the first three projects but still substantially weighted in favor of investing in teacher training.

One teacher-participant said as she received her SmartBoard, "Great! Now I can work all the time!"

In the workshop sessions, the teachers were challenged to reexamine, revise, and refine the projects they had developed for the Writing for Publication program, using them as the basis for a formal presentation that they would shape into a ninety-minute inservice workshop. This time the SmartBoards were used exclusively for creating handouts and overheads for the workshops they were shaping. None of the participating teachers owned a laptop; one teacher-participant said as she received her SmartBoard, "Great! Now I can work all the time!"

At the end of this program the eighteen teachers presented their workshops in abbreviated form at a Technology Share Fair that was attended by teachers and administrators from other area school districts. Each teacher had twenty minutes to demonstrate what he or she had prepared, using handouts and overheads composed on the SmartBoards and formatted on more sophisticated computers. The teachers used scanned-in pictures, clip-art graphics, and graphics of their own design in extremely professional presentations. These teachers, most of whom had used technology sparingly before their work with us, were now the creators and originators of spin-off projects integrating technology with curriculum. They are now being invited to conduct technology workshops across western Massachusetts.

Lessons Learned

The staff development programs described above have, in different degrees and ways, accomplished two related goals: the integration of technology into the curriculum and the increase of teachers' and students' access to technology. The teachers have become agents in this integration, not simply victims left to cope with the fallout from the introduction of computers into their classrooms. Other projects in the same school system involved placing computers in classrooms and labs, often through corporate sponsorship, without project-based training programs such as ours, apparently in the hope that if the equipment was available, teachers would automatically use it. The results of these types of projects have been universally unsatisfactory: equipment-rich classrooms in which the technology was not integrated with the teachers' and students' needs and where, in some cases, the equipment was not used at all.

Training-oriented projects such as ours have helped teachers become advocates for the installation of technology in their schools and classrooms. For example, during the Writing for Publication program, one teacher brought her home computer to school so that she could help her students more effectively complete a number of projects. The teacher reported this to the principal and reminded him often that her home computer could do things that the computer she had at school could not. She noted that after a while the principal began to feel ashamed; the result: the school is buying her a more powerful computer for her classroom.

The hope was that if the equipment was available, teachers would automatically use it. However, the results of these types of projects have been universally unsatisfactory.

Other teachers in our project requested SmartBoards for their own use, and the administration has responded by ordering one hundred of them for a lending program modeled on the one we completed. In both of these cases, teachers approached administrators with particular projects that required specific technology. Such requests seem to be much more effective than the abstract complaint that without technology the students will fall behind.

Here are some principles that can be distilled from our experience:

First, focus on teachers and not on hardware. Our projects, with the exception of the Lending Project, principally bought time for teachers to work together to plan and to reflect. The ratio of funds expended on release time to equipment was 5 to 1 in

three of the projects and 4 to 1 in the fourth. The lesson: teachers are the most effective agents of change.

A second lesson: introduce technology into a curriculum not in the abstract (e.g., a workshop on *Excel* or *Claris Works)* but in the context of a particular project, ideally one that can be published for an audience beyond an individual, isolated classroom.

A third lesson: begin with relatively inexpensive, low-end technology. From an institutional perspective, buying enough up-to-date PCs and printers for all users is often not possible; even if it were, schools cannot typically afford to replace equipment every four years or so. Beginning with low-end technology may also be best in terms of staff development. It is much less time-consuming and expensive to train teachers to use SmartBoards as compared to full-fledged personal computers. SmartBoards provide a transition to more complex machines, permitting teachers to develop their skills gradually instead of facing a steep learning curve. Much of the activity of writing simply does not require high-end technology. It thus seems that much of the activity of writing, and perhaps of other activities as well, can be accomplished using low-end, inexpensive, specialized technology.

Much has been written about how technology will revolutionize education. Our experience suggests that technology will indeed revolutionize education but that the principal agents of change will and should be teachers who are given effective programs for development and support.

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Charles Moran is director of the Western Massachusetts Writing Project, and Patricia Fitzsimmons-Hunter is co-director of the Western Massachusetts Writing Project.

Spotlighting Excellence

BY DENISE AMOS

The following teaching idea is adapted from the Louisville Writing Project Network News, *December 1998.*

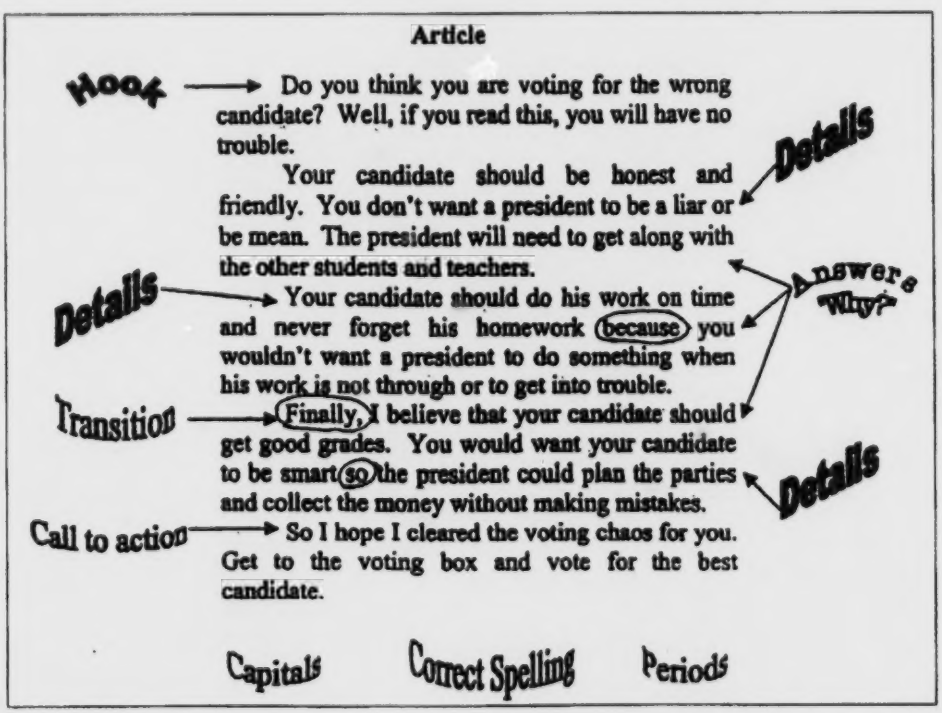
Last February my students completed an on-demand prompt provided by the Kentucky Department of Education Portfolio Initiatives. The topic was "How to Choose a Class President." The prompt instructed students to write an article for a class newspaper describing what kind of person would make a good class president and why. Before students began writing, I reviewed with them some of the elements of transactive writing on which they would likely be judged — a hook, supporting details and transitions, for instance.

I was so pleased with several of their responses to the prompt that I began to look for ways to spotlight their progress. I remembered a concept that Lucy Calkins introduced at a workshop I had recently attended. Calkins suggested we search for students we can make "Writing Stars for A Day." She urged us, for example, to look for students who are trying new genres, substituting more powerful word choices or experimenting with strong beginnings.

What use could I make of Calkins' ideas to highlight student work? I recalled a commercial poster I had displayed in my room, one designed to teach the parts of a friendly letter. Although the writing style of the poster was nondescript, I liked the annotations used to identify the parts of a friendly letter. I hoped that displaying the poster would help my fourth-grade students explore purpose and audience in their writing. Thinking about this poster, it occurred to me, "Why don't I create a poster from one of the "class president" essays? What better way to make a student a "star" than to turn that student's work into a tool for teaching transactive writing?"

I chose a piece by Ross Shircliffe who had completed the "class president" assignment completely and succinctly; his order was logical and clear, his tone appropriate. I reasoned, if I were to add instructive annotations to Ross's piece, then enlarge his essay to poster size, students who were struggling with this transactive form could benefit. I used Microsoft Word to add text boxes to label key rhetorical elements in Ross's piece. I printed the final poster, giving copies to Ross and to each of the fourth-grade and special education teachers. We now had on our classroom wall a writing model from among our ranks.

Denise Amos is a teacher consultant with the Louisville Writing Project and teaches at Crestwood Elementary School in Crestwood, KY.


Article
Hook
Do you think you are voting for the wrong candidate? Well, if you read this, you will have no trouble.
Details
Your candidate should be honest and friendly. You don't want a president to be a liar or be mean. The president will need to get along with the other students and teachers.
Details
Your candidate should do his work on time and never forget his homework because you wouldn't want a president to do something when his work is not through or to get into trouble.
Answers "Why?"
Transition
Finally, I believe that your candidate should get good grades. You would want your candidate to be smart so the president could plan the parties and collect the money without making mistakes.
Details
Call to action
So I hope I cleared the voting chaos for you. Get to the voting box and vote for the best candidate.
Capitals
Correct Spelling
Periods

Rhetoric and Human Consciousness: A History

BY CRAIG R. SMITH

PROSPECT HEIGHTS, ILL: WAVELAND PRESS, 1998. $27.95; 456 PAGES

REVIEWED BY JOHN HAGAMAN

Whether we live in an educational reform state like Kentucky or any state, teachers are practicing rhetoricians whenever we write or speak to our classes, parents, administrators, and the media. Cicero would say we have an obligation to know some of the philosophy and history of rhetoric in order to use our power prudently, and an excellent place to fulfill this obligation is Craig R. Smith's recent text, *Rhetoric and Human Consciousness: A History.*

The text is one of the clearest that I've found in seven years of examining texts for a History of Rhetoric course I teach to preservice teachers. Here is a rhetorician who practices what he preaches. Each chapter begins with an introduction that accurately anticipates what follows and a conclusion that pulls the chapter together. Questions are offered for readers to ponder at the end of each chapter, from the factual to the reflective. And throughout, Smith's style is clear and readable. Terms are defined and ample illustrations of theory are offered throughout. In addition, the text is visually attractive with interesting photographs and plates. *Rhetoric and Human Consciousness* is an excellent reference work that belongs in our own professional libraries.

Smith believes that rhetoric is "a barometer of the evolution of human consciousness." He traces this evolution through myth and narrative to Greek and Roman rhetoric, with a separate chapter on Aristotle, to the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and to modern and postmodern times. His chapter on Kenneth Burke, whose roots are traced to Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, is extremely insightful and made Burke accessible to me as never before.

The constant that emerges about rhetoric is that it deals with persuasive skills, "critical to survival in the world," and that it is an "art form with its own set of generative principles." Rhetoric not only communicates truths but "can find truths that elude other disciplines particularly in the postmodern era" because it is at home in matters of contingency, when absolute truths aren't accessible.

The text is unique in that it "explores the usefulness of rhetorical theory with case studies," which include the Gospel of Matthew, Daniel Webster, Shakespeare, "Murphy Brown," "Seinfeld," and several feminists, among others. The text is peppered with references that bring historical figures into contemporary focus; for example, 18th century Hugh Blair is described as someone who "would have favored the V-chip and other forms of censorship we face today." Many examples have a "political cast" since Smith has been a researcher, writer and analyst for CBS News for convention, election night and inaugural coverage, and has worked as a full-time presidential speech writer as well as consultant to "numerous other political candidates." This puts Smith squarely in the rhetorical tradition of serving civic functions.

In the end, Smith is completely successful in his goal of presenting a history of rhetorical theory that is "fair, comprehensive, and relevant," one that stresses the crucial importance of rhetoric to decision making. In a world where legislators and parents often influence what occurs in our classrooms, this book is a life preserver for new and experienced teachers alike to learn about the rich tradition of which we are a part and to be affirmed in our decision to remain involved in the dialogues that surround us.

John Hagaman is director of the Western Kentucky University Writing Project.

Teacher Study Groups:
Building Community through Dialogue and Reflection

BY BARB BIRCHAK, CLAY CONNOR, KATHLEEN MARIE CRAWFORD, LESLIE H. KAHN, SANDY KASER, SUSAN TUMER, AND KATHY G. SHORT

URBANA, ILL: NCTE, 1998. $22.95; 148 PAGES

REVIEWED BY ANNE-MARIE HALL

A teacher's mantra could be "too much to do, too little time." Or maybe "no one listens to me." Teachers who feel pressured just to get through the day or the week or who feel unappreciated may be surprised that making structured time to reflect and dialogue on their teaching and learning can actually rejuvenate and empower them. This new book from NCTE is about just that.

Six Tucson teachers—Birchak, Connor, Crawford (a Southern Arizona Writing Project Fellow), Kahn, Kaser, Turner and one University of Arizona professor (Short) audiotaped and transcribed two different school-based teacher study groups over a three year period. In their book, they argue that forming teacher study groups builds inclusive communities and relationships in schools, helps teachers connect theory and practice, supports curricular reform, and develops a sense of professionalism among the teachers. These authors believe that study groups are a new model of professional development that improves on the old inservice presentational model.

I read this compelling, jargon-free, friendly and practical book in three evenings, appreciating its detailed information describing how to organize and facilitate the dynamics of a study group. For the authors, lasting curricular reform occurs when teachers are involved in "defining their own problems, creating knowledge, and transforming themselves."

The authors describe the types of study groups — school-based, job-alike, or topic-centered — and discuss ways groups can focus on issues, professional literature, or teacher research. The authors shuttle between these larger issues and practical logistics such as time, space, and group member roles. They provide sample notes showing different styles of notetaking from different study groups and a transcript (with italicized commentary) on one whole study group session. Further, they suggest ways to brainstorm a topic so that it is broad enough to sustain several sessions, yet familiar enough to everyone that the participants know enough to spend meaningful time on the subject.

Most study groups follow a similar organizational pattern: general sharing, focused dialogue, and negotiation of the next focus.

The writers make useful distinctions. For example, they develop the idea that professional sharing is different from lounge sharing. They also cite Douglas Barnes' work on differences between presentational talk and sharing, replying and assessing—critical delineations for personal and professional life.

An entire chapter is devoted to practical advice on choosing a facilitator and to special strategies for facilitating a group of peers. Teacher facilitators always wear too hats — that of participant and leader. The writers offer specific suggestions on ways facilitators can *talk* and *manage* when sharing, supporting, questioning, building community, negotiating, clarifying, and summarizing. The authors also argue that the job of facilitator should rotate, since learning how to manage a large group successfully helps each individual to better internalize those skills, thus they also become better study group participants and classroom teachers.

As a new model of professional development, as a vehicle to inspire more reflective teaching and as a way build professional support communities, this book is a breath of fresh air in the field. We owe a great debt to the hard work of these seven teachers—all of whom testify that the benefits of study groups far outweigh the problems. Indeed, they even admit surprise at how profound and far-reaching the effects of the study group experiences have been. Their work takes us a large step toward less competitive and more cohesive teaching communities.

Anne-Marie Hall is director of the Southern Arizona Writing Project.

Authorizing Readers:
Resistance and Respect in the Teaching of English

BY PETER J. RABINOWITZ AND MICHAEL W. SMITH

NEW YORK: NCTE AND TEACHERS COLLEGE PRESS, 1998. $22.95; 174 PAGES

REVIEWED BY NANCY D. KERSELL

This collection of eight essays, four by each coauthor, focuses on a complex and familiar concern for literature teachers at the secondary and post-secondary levels: how we can clarify and expand the role students play in classroom discussions about literature. All too often, the traditional role for the teacher has been to articulate his or her interpretation of a literary work to influence or even replace a student's independent reading of a text. Rabinowitz and Smith propose that if "the questions that most touch on the lives of our students—including risky questions about culturally-charged issues—ought to be at the heart of our pedagogical practice" (152), then authorial reading offers educators the best way to elicit and educate student responses to what they read.

The format of this book allows each coauthor to write an alternating chapter, establishing a "conversation" or dialogue between them which balances their individual strengths and interests. Rabinowitz primarily concentrates on the theoretical framework for defining authorial and narrative audiences, while Smith discusses the impact of these roles that take "students and their interpretive practices seriously" (2). While their essays define their boundaries and symbiosis between theory and practice, the authors also defend their particular and not always harmonious perspectives on the crucial questions posed by Wayne Booth in his forward: "'Why teach literature in the first place?' and 'How can you do it not just effectively in the sense of winning converts to your view of things, but in the sense of producing full ethical and intellectual development in students?" (xi).

Throughout the book, Rabinowitz and Smith confront these questions by determining the positions a reader takes while reading and the types of activities readers engage in. They identify the authorial audience as certain readers an author has in mind when writing: readers perceived as capable of responding to the literary text based on particular cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic sensibilities. Such readers respond to and appreciate literature based on "publicly available social practices" (8) rather than private associations. However, Rabinowitz acknowledges that "joining the authorial audience ... is a provisional testing, not a permanent adopting, of a perspective" (14).

Students also function as a narrative audience for fiction and poetry by identifying with and understanding the speaker or character's perspective and purpose in the work. The coauthors provide numerous examples and models from their own classroom experiences to illustrate how this role helps students develop interpretive strategies for grasping verbal and situational irony, or for gauging the reliability of the narrator.

Through these capacities as authorial and narrative audiences, according to Rabinowitz and Smith, students acquire sufficient skills and knowledge to respect, and at times resist, the interpretations submitted by those in the privileged positions of author and teacher. In this atmosphere, the teacher also focuses on "rehabilitating authors as essential participants in literary conversation" (47). Although these expectations may appear somewhat idealistic given the pressures imposed on many teachers and students to fulfill mandated curricular objectives, literature teachers can agree at least in principle with the desirability of creating an environment where "students and teacher can engage, if not as equals, then certainly as partners in a democratic inquiry" (20) about the substance and significance of literature.

By concentrating on pivotal issues in classroom practice, the coauthors of *Authorizing Readers* provide both beginning and experienced teachers with a stimulating blend of literary theory and sensible pedagogy. Although Peter Rabinowitz occasionally lapses into stilted, pedantic language, his meticulous research establishes a useful framework supporting the progressive teaching practices advocated by Michael Smith. Of course, those of us who teach literature are reluctant to abandon our cherished desire articulated by Rabinowitz and Smith to "seek a balance between honoring a student's experience and educating it" (111). With that aspiration in mind, these authors challenge our assumptions about the capabilities of students to read intelligently and responsibly while prompting us to reassess the causes and consequences for the way we teach literature.

Nancy D. Kersell is director of the Northern Kentucky Writing Project.

The Performance of Self in Student Writing

BY THOMAS NEWKIRK

PORTSMOUTH, NH: BOYNTON/COOK-HEINEMANN, 1997. $20.00; 124 PAGES

REVIEWED BY CHARLES MORAN

This short, wonderfully-written book is extremely important for writing teachers in these times. Although Newkirk writes specifically about first-year college writers, readers can easily extrapolate from this fitting applications to all grade levels. This is partly because of Newkirk's extensive experience with K-12 education, and partly because Newkirk makes his case with long selections of actual student writing.

The book is an argument for the continued inclusion of personal, 'expressive' writing in our classes—the kind of writing that has been the backbone of our Writing Project Summer Institutes and of our writing curricula since the inception of the National Writing Project. Many contemporary teachers/writers/scholars in the field of first-year college writing now argue that personal, autobiographical writing should not be the center of our writing curriculum. James Berlin, among others, has asserted that an emphasis upon personal writing inhibits the writer's political/social consciousness and thereby forestalls social change—that an 'expressivist' approach to writing is politically conservative. Lester Faigley, among others, has argued from a postmodernist perspective that the 'self' is a romantic illusion, and that a curriculum based upon the expression of 'self' is simply wrong. Harriet Malinowitz, among others, has asserted that a curriculum based upon personal writing puts many writers, perhaps most writers, at substantial risk. Students go public with their deepest loves and fears often at their peril.

To add to this growing critical consensus, emerging technologies and today's political climate push us toward workplace writing and away from the personal writing that has been such an important part of our teaching since the 1970s. I think here of what we have learned from the work of Ken Macrorie, James Britton, Nancy Martin, Donald Graves, Linda Rief, Lucy Calkins, Peter Elbow, Tom Romano, Jack Wilde, Nancie Atwell-the list grows as I type. Should all this be superceded?

Tom Newkirk gives us the arguments we need if we are to claim space for expressive writing in our classrooms. He argues that when one writes about the self, that this writing is itself performance, a construction-not entirely a plumbing of the depths, not at all the discovery and presentation of an essential 'self,' but a presentation of a possible self to an audience composed of teacher and classmates. This 'self' is performed to, and to a degree constructed by, the society that is its readers. The 'self,' then, is not private, but social.

Having defined 'expressive' writing as performance, Newkirk looks at students' performance of self in their writing and at our reactions, as English teachers, to this performance. He shows us how to reread both the writing and our reaction to it as culture- and class-bound, explaining in this process how it is that we English teachers find ourselves so far from today's cultural mainstreams.

The strength of the book are these readings of actual pieces of student writing. In these readings Newkirk helps readers see the ways in which students are, yes, expressing themselves, but also, and simultaneously, constructing a self and presenting it, performing it, for their readers. He helps us understand the genres that students write in: the testimonial, the eulogy, the spectator piece. He demonstrates how a teacher's reading of student writing may not be fully responsive to the work of the writers. He helps us value the words our students write, encouraging us to listen to these writers before we speak.

Charles Moran is director of the Western Massachusetts Writing Project.

Call for Manuscripts

We welcome lively, well-written articles on the writing process and on teaching writing, as well as articles on research in the teaching of it. The articles can take the form of personal experience or opinion, or can explore the work of others who have contributed to the field.

We are especially interested in articles by classroom teachers. If you have an idea you would like to develop, send a query letter or give us a call at 510-642-0976. Send ideas, drafts, and completed manuscripts to: The NWP Quarterly, *Graduate School of Education, 615 University Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.*

— The Editors

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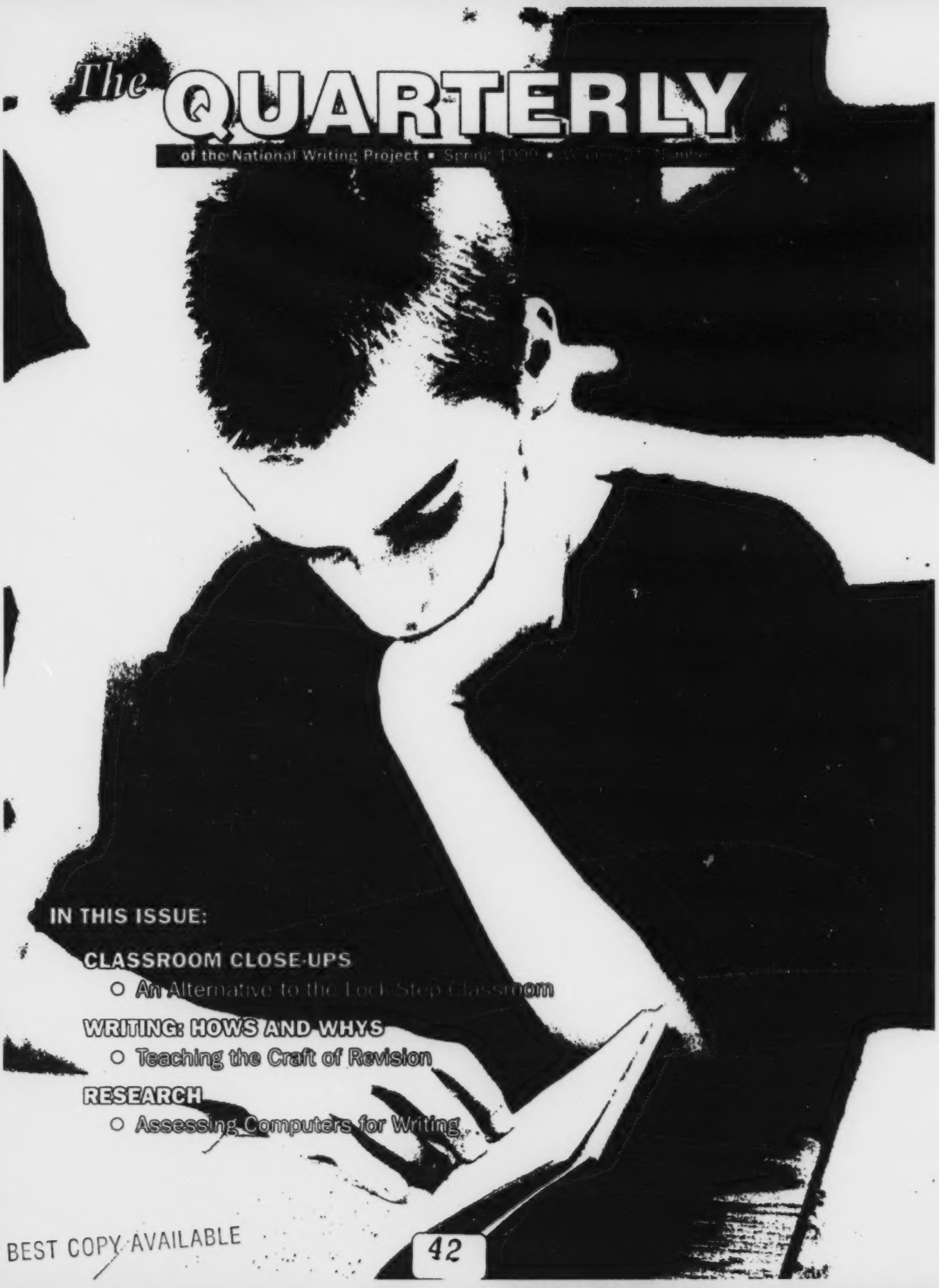

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They Will Choose to Learn: An Alternative to the Lock-Step Classroom

BY JON APPLEBY

"I can never read as fast as the people in my English classes, as fast as the people who talk all the time.... I don't want to compete with them. Why should I? ... We all know who's going to get the highest grades. What's the point? ... You just do what the teacher seems to want. You don't really have to read the books."

This quotation is a compilation of comments made by my students at Noble High School about many of their classroom experiences. If you teach at an American high school, you probably know many students like mine who have often been unsuccessful and who, to be blunt, often resist and disrupt classrooms and teachers' best-laid plans.

My job at Noble is to offer students a way to make up English and social studies credits; my mission is to help them to become better learners and return to regular classes with the tools they need to succeed. My experience in this alternative situation gives me, perhaps, a different perspective on what needs to change if these students are to become thriving members of our classrooms and schools. My students teach me daily that I need to learn more about the power and necessity of choice.

In general, my students share several common characteristics. They have a fierce, moody independence, which translates frequently into a lack of trust and disrespect for authority. They hold in common an injured pride which makes many of them unwilling to ask publicly for help and which makes most of them prefer intentional failure to the risk of appearing inadequate before their peers. Most suffer from self-destructiveness — born of years of resisting teachers and learning — which creates a self-defense of excuses for failing to do their work. Finally, many have developed stubborn, hard-and-fast opinions in order to avoid doubtful, dangerous reflection. Many of my students have horrific problems at home, but nearly all will freely tell you that they have been damaged, not only by their home lives, but also by their schools. Three-quarters of my students are male.

Our overcrowded high school serves three sprawling rural towns in Maine. The faculty is moving forward with inclusion and heterogeneity, and the school has "untracked." Using the same philosophy that all students should be treated alike, beginning next year there will be no "alternative" class like mine in which kids who have failed can make up credits.

I believe I have developed one approach to teaching and to learning with these students which may be helpful to teachers struggling with the task of learning to teach heterogeneous or challenging groups. What follows are portraits of a few of my students, and my reflections on my experiences with one method of teaching that provides individualization and choice in a secondary classroom.

Brian

"School is a big part of survival, because you always have problems. Whether you are an A student, or an F student. Whether it be school work, teachers, or classmates. Some people think survival is just going into the woods and setting up camp. To tell you the truth, camping is the easiest form of survival." Brian is a seventeen-year-old senior who dropped out of school last year and returned after a long, difficult summer trying to make a life with his girlfriend. Together he and his girlfriend faced the issue of her pregnancy, and Brian, realizing that he had little future, returned to school ready to do his best.

Teachers who do not know him regard Brian as tough and difficult; Brian admits to stubbornness and has worked hard to control his quick temper. He works every day after school from five to midnight pumping gas. He regularly reports to school, exhausted, a travel mug of coffee in his hand. Habitually late, he is in danger of failing his first-block shop class. When he is late, he gets no credit for the period, and his teacher will not let him make up the missed time.

Brian is exceptionally good with his hands; he builds replica model boats and fixes cars. English has always been very difficult for him, especially writing. He had not read a book in two years, and the books he did read before that had been read out loud in the off-campus alternative class. In the first ten weeks, Brian chose to complete a unit on Hunting, read *The Firm* and *A Handmaid's Tale* (with the help of an audiotape), read six short stories, rewrote his paper several times, and led an excellent presentation on the different ways to look at hunting. In the second ten weeks, Brian chose the Survival unit, read *Fahrenheit 451* and *Hiroshima*, and wrote a powerful paper about survival both in the books and in his own life. "Everyone at some point in life, I don't care who you are, you're going to have to survive the world out there," he concluded.

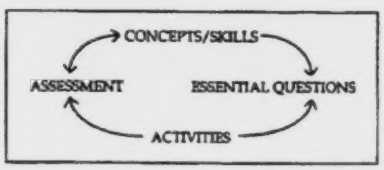
They Will Choose to Learn

Often Brian asked two other students to keep the noise down because they were keeping him from his work. One of the students be confronted was one of the angriest students in our school, a person whom many adults avoid challenging. "It's weird," Brian said to me. "The classes I'm doing well in are the academics. The only class I'm flunking is Mowers and Blowers! Would you ever have believed that?"

I wanted to set up a curriculum for my eighty students that would allow wide choice and also hold up high standards. I wanted to individualize, but I also needed some system to guide students who might require or want help with choices, as well as an assessment system which would make logistics manageable.

From Foxfire workshops that I attended, I learned about the notion of "givens." Givens are the expectations that Foxfire teachers give to their students at the onset of a year, term, or unit. Well-written givens may include a list of readings and activities required by the teacher, as well as the statement of open-ended problems or questions which empower students to make choices about their learning. I think of my givens as maps I hand out to explorers in my classroom. These maps have to be reassuring, motivating, and specific. In an individualized classroom I want my expectations to be very clear.

From a Coalition of Essential Schools workshop on integrated curriculum, I learned to plan curriculum by addressing four areas. Beginning with the *Concepts and/or Skills* I want to teach, I plan backwards: I try to phrase a broad, open-ended *"Essential Question"* that will frame and investigate the concepts I have chosen. The question or questions serve as organizing centers for my thinking. Then I write a *Final Assessment*, usually a project or multifaceted response which will allow students some choice in how they demonstrate their knowledge of the concepts. Finally, I brainstorm possible *Activities* that might help teach the subskills, information, or processes I want students to learn. The following diagram illustrates the process:



Although this process was originally designed to give interdisciplinary teams of teachers a tool to organize diverse thinking, I have found the tool works in isolation as well. I use it to compose basic units, which I often offer to friends and colleagues for suggested additions, changes, and criticism.

Erik

Erik's handicap is that he is a genuinely inquisitive and reflective person; he is a student of life. Erik takes time to answer direct questions, and he seems benevolent about other people's, especially teachers', impatience with him. He is always carrying a book that no one has assigned. He dresses with his own style of shorts with formal shirts, or baggy pants with abstractly designed tee shirts. He tends to do homework last or not at all because it often doesn't interest him as much as other things, such as Marshall McCluhan or a book on Buddhist religious thought.

Erik designed his own unit he called "Film and Seeing." He read John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, chapters from film textbooks and histories, a book on meditation and another on television and its impact. "Man is in a race by himself. It must be his nature to run and reach for his dreams.... Images are created by men who realize their potential to say something," he wrote in his paper, which was a collection of distilled ideas about how mankind views the world in the attempt to reach a state of peace.

Eric followed this exploration by devising a new unit, "How Some People See the World Differently." During this ten-week stretch, he read a grab bag of books including notebooks of Salvador Dali and a book on the Bauhaus artists. He did an abstract painting, which he also treated as collage for his assessment, in which he integrated photos of William Burroughs and Bob Dylan, images of sky and landscape that would have made Rene Magritte proud, as well as quotes from Dali.

Although Erik did very well with me, he was called into a meeting with all of his teachers because he was doing poorly in other classes. After Erik listened to several teachers list what he had not done, I spoke enthusiastically about Erik's performance in my class. I asked my colleagues if they had changed the way they were teaching to suit Erik's reflective nature and clearly different way of thinking and learning. My colleagues took offense, and I embarrassed

They Will Choose to Learn

Erik somewhat by talking about how shy, reflective, and intelligent he was. Erik wrote in his journal afterwards:

> *The meeting forced confrontation with myself. It's hard to talk with a teacher. It's like offering myself piece by piece for judgment. I think I try to make an art out of life. I like to keep silent and observant and only communicate in small subtle ways like movements, and talk only when I really feel moved to do so. The presence of a judge causes my thinking to blur. I know that if I had relaxed I could think clearly but if there is pressure it shortens my thinking and I am helpless.*

With Erik's permission, I sent copies of his journal entry to his teachers.

The Need for Long-Term Thinking

I believe that students are not asked to do enough long-term thinking, so I developed ten-week units. I decided that the givens for each unit should be presented on one typed page. Because I wanted each unit to involve roughly the same amount of work, I decided that each unit would require the choice and reading of two books; each unit provided suggested book titles and encouraged students to seek their own. I also included a list of short, provocative readings.

Each unit asked for an interactive journal, which was intended to help students collect ideas toward a final paper. This paper was to attempt an answer to the essential question. The students were finally required to discuss the paper with an invited panel of teachers, administrators, students and volunteers. The system was designed to provide students with choice while allowing no easy way out.

The following are the givens for one sample unit. The final two assignments are the assessment, which I hope will not only demonstrate the student's knowledge but will also help provide practice in connected thinking. The suggested activities are fairly specific for students who want and need detailed direction; all activities and choice of books are "negotiable" if a student has another, better idea.

Concept:

NATURE (ten weeks; one quarter)

Essential Questions:

Should nature be preserved?
Is nature inherently valuable?
Is nature inherently good?

Activities:

Students will read two of the following:

The Tracker, by Tom Brown, Jr.
Black Elk Speaks, as told to John G. Neihardt
Education of Little Tree, by Forest Carter
Walden by Henry David Thoreau
The Search by Tom Brown, Jr.
The Journals of Lewis and Clark

Students will:

- research a case study of a natural environment which is being protected, such as the Grand Canyon, Baxter State Park, and Crane's Beach, and write a brief paper describing the problems and attempted solutions in a particular case.
- become expert in a particular area or domain of the natural world (e.g., whales, track identification, bird identification, sea life, trees) and will demonstrate that knowledge in a manner of their own choosing.
- research Charles Darwin and his theories and present Darwin's ideas in a manner of their own choosing.
- write a three-page, detailed paper on a problem in the modern world having to do with changes in nature which are brought about by humankind: rain-forest elimination, global warming, ozone, pollution of the air or groundwater, etc.
- photograph or draw at least six different natural objects or places and write a supporting paragraph that explains why objects or places were selected.
- understand the following terms and ideas: natural selection, evolution, aesthetics, habitat, species, survival of the fittest.
- prepare for and perform both sides of a debate on the question "Should nature be preserved?"
- keep a thorough, interactive journal describing their thoughts and discoveries about nature.
- write (using the journal as a resource) and present a paper describing what nature means to them to an invited panel from outside the class.

This unit draws on biology (Darwin), philosophy (Thoreau), history (Lewis and Clark), and literature (The *Education of Little Tree)*, together providing the student some genuine choices in learning paths.

When students asked about grades, I told them we would use a rubric which would evaluate four areas: their readings, their journals and activities, their presentations, and their papers. No grades would be given before a one-to-one conference at the end of the ten weeks. I did not want to dicker over minor grades; I wanted to debate and emphasize ideas.

Keith

"What's up?" Keith says to me, sometimes several times a day, when we happen to pass in the halls. Keith is a senior who needs all his credits to graduate. In his freshman year, he was in the off-campus alternative class, and he is the first to admit that he has spent his high school career figuring out how not to do whatever reading and writing was required. He states matter-of-factly that he did not read a book or write a paper during his junior year, and in our building he has been a notorious wanderer in the hallways. I have known Keith since he entered high school, and I have maintained a good, direct relationship with him.

In the first ten weeks, he chose the "Survival" unit, read part of one book, did not write a paper, and did not pass. In the second ten weeks he chose Tolerance, read *The Painted Bird* and *Adrift*, wrote and rewrote the first paper of his high school career, faced his panel, and saved his semester. I have heard him recommend *The Painted Bird* to several other students, and because of his interest in that book, he devised a unit for the third quarter on the Holocaust.

His papers are full of mechanical errors, fragments, and leaps of faith between paragraphs, but for the first time in his school life he is working steadily on his writing.

The Importance of Choice in Reading

From the first day, even the most reluctant students were reading.

Because students read different books, no sense of competition entered their learning, and because I had taken the time to talk to each student in order to find something to recommend, students felt immediately valued and at home. We cultivated a sense of individualism which enhanced their willingness to learn. The short readings I provided were shared in many cases, and I frequently overheard students recommending those stories and essays to each other. I worked hard to find books for the students, and they, in turn, conducted their own book searches, even buying the books themselves and bringing me the receipts for reimbursement.

I had fun every day generating dialogues with students about their readings. Informal dialogue works very well as an assessment tool, and such talk seems to be a definite developmental step necessary for students who lack confidence in their writing. When students offer ideas or make connections in conversation that are sound and excellent, I am able to jump on those moments instantly and reinforce learning.

Graham

Graham is a junior who hangs out in a group of boys who are all frequently suspended. During the first semester, he happened to be in one of my sections with two of his friends, and he socialized more than he read. First he chose Survival and read next to nothing. Graham and I never developed any rapport. I repeatedly asked the group to be quiet so that others could work; one of his friends stormed out of the class twice. At times I asked Graham to clean up his language or to stop pounding his fist on the desk. During the second quarter, I went to guidance, looked at the schedules of the three friends, and decided with the guidance counselor that Graham could be in another section of mine without having to make any major changes in any schedules. When I informed Graham of the change, he became very angry. As we walked into guidance together, he threw his folder in the air, and his papers fluttered dramatically to the ground. I asked him if he felt better, which I regret. My remark only made it harder for us to talk. Graham dropped my class.

Midway through the third quarter, after a meeting with the vice principal and guidance, Graham returned to my class. He has shown up twice. Usually he leaves school without permission at lunch, before our class begins. There are no penalties that will keep him in school.

No Easy Answers

Not every student engaged in every writing activity. While almost everyone was reading consistently, many students balked at journal-keeping and, in so doing, made the

writing of the final paper a very difficult task. Many of the students who did not work in any of their classes did little or no work for me, either. Some students had difficulty with the freedom of not being graded until the end, and when students fell behind it was my policy to remind without nagging. But for the most part, even students who did not complete all my requirements respected my classroom, and they did more in my class than they did anywhere else.

Matt

Matt, a junior, has long brown hair, piercing eyes, and — to use his words — "too many fathers." He admits to past drug use and complains that he can't stay still for ninety-minute periods. Saddled with a severe learning disability, Matt has always disliked English. Here he describes his first feelings about living in the country. "The furst week was hell for me I codint sleep weth the sound of the owolls and avey thig alts that went Bo in the night. But I lornd not to dispiys the sound of nacher but to imbras it and so my love for nacher was born." Matt and I agreed that I had as much trouble reading his language as he had reading mine, and he agreed to use audio tapes to assist his reading.

Matt is extremely verbal: what he hears, he remembers. He listened to *The Fellowship of the Rings* and liked it so much he bought the tapes from me. A special education teacher types his papers for him, but I insist on seeing the longhand copies because they help me to learn his language better. In the second quarter, he read *I Ching, The Art of Peace,* and *Siddartha*; his presentation and paper about meditation were excellent. For the first time in his life, Matt received an "A" in English.

Failure rates in my class were initially very high: 47 percent failed in the first quarter. That figure, combined with a lack of free periods and my own personal problems, started me on an emotional tailspin. I wondered if I set my standards too high, or if I was doing students, who continued to do poorly in other classes, any favor by offering this alternative structure. The teachers who volunteered for our panels were the teachers who seemed to be successful with my students anyway, and my hope that I could connect students back to a broad cross-section of the faculty did not come to pass.

I wonder now if that time of deeply felt failure wasn't perhaps necessary somehow. Maybe I needed to feel that sense of failure that I know my students have felt. In any case, I learned powerfully that the healthy functioning of a teacher is as personal as the well-being of the students. It's a defect in me that, impatient, I always expect success to be immediate. I went back to work more determined than ever.

In the second quarter, 41 percent failed. Too many students, accustomed to just getting by, aimed at the minimum and miscalculated. Many students believed I would cave in and pass them without a paper or presentation. I worried that I had not provided sufficient models of good and excellent student work. I had at least a dozen students who had done the necessary reading but refused to write, to face panels, or to invent other means of assessment. Increasingly, I have been able to coax more students to write and present, but the process of persuasion, which depends on deepening trust, is slow. I am confident I have begun a process that will breed more and more success — that habits of mind are at least beginning to be formed.

More and more students have been writing their first high school papers, relating personal experiences to ideas and events in readings, making convincing use of research, and doing impressive amounts of reading. If reading needs to precede the thinking and reflection necessary for good writing, then we were on the right track.

Cameron

Cameron is a ward of the state. Soft-spoken, he lives with an aunt who comes to school to participate in his grading conferences. Cam is learning disabled, and reading is difficult for him. In the first semester, doing the Nature unit, he became an expert on polar bears, read *White Wolf,* painted a large landscape on a classroom wall, and wrote a college essay about a canoe trip he took last summer as a guide. He wrote:

> *The more I have learned in and out of the classroom about Nature, the more questions I have... Whether in my back woods or hundreds of miles away, on top of a mountain on a clear day or on a river through the woods, the feeling of harmony is what keeps me coming back, longing for the time to get out. For me I do not have to be in nature physically but yet, in my dreams, in my drifting moments, and in my heart...*

They Will Choose to Learn

During the second semester, Cam studied Mexico and the Aztecs in preparation for a Teen Adventure trip to the Yucatan that he was to take in February with eight other students. One of my colleagues who heard his presentation said his research was the most complete, including comparisons of various theories, that she has ever heard from a high school student. Cam went to Mexico and on his return gave an open presentation about his trip in the library. He has been accepted at Unity College in their Outdoor Leadership Program, which trains students to be Maine Guides.

Grades: The Non-Motivator

I have been surprised and amused to see how little grades motivate my students. The extrinsic reward of a good number is largely ignored, perhaps because most of our students have long since given up the idea of attaining the A in favor of just passing. My high standards meant that even those who aimed at the minimum still completed a lot of work. Also, I found that students held no grudges when I failed them; they seemed to respect the fact that we stuck to high standards that allowed them to fail, if that was what they chose to do. We had remarkable success with many students in the second quarter, when they realized what they had not done and what they needed to do.

Looking at the Learner as a Person

Even the students who did not buy into the givens respect the rights of the other students in my classroom, and the students who fail have done far more reading than they would have in a conventional, let's-all-read-the-same-book setting. My dialogues with those reluctant students are very personal and direct about their anger and negative choices. I try not to tell them what to do; I try to get them to see what their choices are. In this environment, I am able to move from student to student to do this kind of counseling. I always let the student know that he/she has the ultimate right to make the negative, self-destructive choice: to fail.

Josh

Josh comes to class early to get the easy chair he likes. Josh's father runs the bus garage for the school district, and Josh and his friend Craig, who is in the same section, run their own small engine repair business in a neighboring town. I carry Josh's business card in my wallet. While Josh is happy and talented with mechanical things, the language of English classes has been difficult for him. He is a concrete thinker who sees how things work. He chose the Automobile unit, wrote a description of a gasoline engine complete with a diagram of all the systems in an engine, interviewed several mechanics, read *Christine* and *Driving Passion,* and wrote a paper, with difficulty. The difficulty was his friend Craig, who hates school and sees no reason to work in classes of any kind. I saw Josh trying to separate himself from his friend, who wanted to claim half of Josh's work, and I saw Josh's discomfort. I approached him, told him I saw his dilemma, and that I admired the way he was searching for a way to save the integrity of his work without hurting his friend.

At the end of the term, when Josh passed, and when I told Craig that I knew Josh had done the work, Josh and Craig had a falling out. Josh held his ground. He has begun to write and show me short fiction, and he has signed up for my writing seminar second semester, an extra English class. I have approached Craig a half dozen times to talk about why he can't seem to care about anything, even something he can choose, but so far Craig won't talk, at least not to me. He smiles, Sphinx-like, sits quietly, and reads perhaps a fifth of the class time. I like to believe that he is thinking about his choices.

The Next Step

I know that I no longer believe that having twenty-five students read the same novel at the same time is fair or motivating for all students. If learning can be individualized with the kids who haven't succeeded, with the class-cutters and the disaffected, I am certain the same tools can bring out the best in truly heterogeneous settings. Many of my colleagues believe that I work with the most difficult students, but I don't find them difficult at all. In one way they are easier to teach than most students because they are painfully honest about themselves and their learning. What these students need is what I believe all students need and want: choice and a genuine sense of personal responsibility for the decision-making in their learning.

Jon Appleby teaches at Noble High School in Berwick, Maine. A version of this article appeared in Raising the Bar: Teaching that Improves Student Performance, *published by the Annenenberg Institute for School Reform.*

Just Give Me a Chance

BY RICHARD MANN

The dugout bench and I were on a first name basis. I was a regular customer, and I had no expectations of any change that day. After all, the season was nearly over. The only unusual change for the game would be the substitute coach. Our coach had to be out of town and didn't expect to get back to town in time. The substitute was a friend of his.

When I arrived at the baseball field, I headed directly for the bench. As the runt of our third- and fourth-grade team, I would wait there until I was summoned to go in and play right field for the last inning. Right field was where all the no-good players had to play. The only reason I got to play at all was a league regulation requiring that all team members be allowed to play in every game. The regulation did not say how much each person had to play.

Just after I had settled in, the substitute coach came over and told me to warm up at second base. I quickly informed him that he must have me mixed up with someone else. I didn't play second base. After he had explained that things were going to be different today, I hustled to this new position. Beginning with the infield, the sub began giving us fielding practice by hitting a ball to each position. I easily snagged mine. Then, he began hitting to the outfield. He called out to center field and hit a high hopper over my head. I knew it was for the center fielder, but I leapt up anyway and snagged the ball in the tip of my glove. I was elated. Then, I saw that our real coach had arrived.

As I ran off the field for the usual pregame pep talk, I tried to avoid the coach. I wasn't sure he'd be happy with me at second base. Just as I was going by him though, he stopped me. "Why didn't you tell me you could play second base?" he asked. Shame came over his face when I innocently responded. "I didn't know; you never gave me a chance."

I should have remembered that lesson. Now I felt ashamed. I could have reached her sooner. Geokesha, was an ordinary looking girl: five foot two, soft face, medium build. She smiled often and spoke softly. She had, though, a far away look: remote, disinterested.

Indeed, before long Geokesha began to show all the signs of one who wasn't going to make it through my tough class. She was tardy constantly, and required trips to the principal for excessive tardies accomplished little. Even when she wasn't tardy, she spent much of her time and mine sleeping. Perhaps a few more trips to the principal could have cured that. But, why bother?

I had seen her type before. Sweet kids who could just never quite get it together. She would sit there and, when awake, just stare. She never asked questions during class, she never volunteered an answer, and she rarely turned work in on time. She just didn't care, so why should I? There were plenty of other students who cherished my attention. Why shouldn't I give it to them?

Still, she was one of my students, and I needed to try to reach her. I graciously gave her more time to make up assignments. I let a few tardies slip by. Occasionally, I would even let her grab a nap. What more could I do? Eventually, I all but wrote her off. One more tardy or absence and she would fail anyway; system policy dictated that. It was out of my hands. I had tried, but she apparently didn't want help.

One day, two weeks before final exams, I decided it was time to do at least one poetry writing assignment. I remembered a quick-write my wife had used in her class. I had just a few minutes left in the period, and the poetry writing would be a good time killer. I placed a transparency with a portrait of an overcast Grand Canyon on the overhead to act as a tone setter for the students' poetry. Then I told them they had about seven minutes to complete a poem. There were the customary moans and groans, but soon the students got busy writing.

The period ended and soon I found myself enjoying a few quiet minutes of my planning period in the lounge. I rather halfheartedly decided to glance through the poems the students had just completed. Most were just what you would expect: dismal attempts to satisfy a teacher's last-minute notions. One, though, grabbed my attention:

Lost and Unknown
by Geokesha Brown

The grass is dry, the sky is gray
It seems as if it's a very gloomy day
Left alone in this mysterious world,
No diamonds and no pearls.
It seems like I'm lost and left alone,
Knowing not where to go.

I'm trapped in this maze
Can't find my way out,
So I guess I'll just wander about.
Some day I'll find it,
I know I will.
In a world lost and unknown.

Just Give Me a Chance

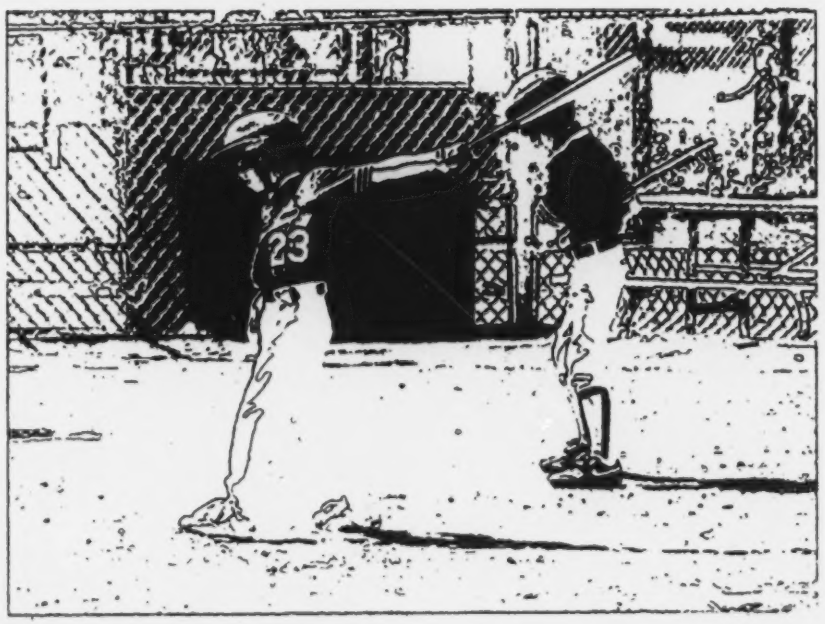
I read the poem two or three times, each time glancing up to check the name: Geokesha Brown. It wasn't perfect–there were some rhythm, grammar and spelling flaws—but the sincerity and depth of her feelings were clear. At first, I was shocked. Then I was angry. Why in the world did she wait until now to show her bent for poetry? She could have been writing all along...

That thought hung on me: just as I could have been a second baseman, Geokesha could have been a writer. She could have been writing all along. Only, I didn't give her a chance. I had neglected the poetry. I had pushed off the extra writing assignments because I wouldn't have time to grade them. I had neglected what really mattered—the students.

I determined that day that my English classes would be different. Every student would be seen as a challenge to be met. Students like Geokesha would be sought out, not just left to chance. Writing, whether prose or poetry, formal or informal, would not just be time filler assignments, but significant writing in which the student could shine. Every student would be given the chance that Geokesha nearly missed.

Geokesha didn't miss that chance though. In fact, she gloried in it. I went to her about a week later and asked if I could use her poem as an example in the writing project I was going to be involved in. Her positive response was nearly inaudible as she signed the permission form, but her smile wasn't.

Geokesha left that summer to study nursing in Hawaii, but the lesson she retaught me remains strong. Students entering my class for the first time know that something is going to be different. The straight, sterile rows



of desks are missing, replaced by those in a horseshoe design. Portraits by Ansel Adams and Norman Rockwell grace the walls. Student writings fill the wall-size display board, and numerous posters declare the room a writing and learning zone.

That first day of class always begins with a literate life history—a written recollection of each student's background as a reader and writer. The students, shy at first, openly share their experiences and compare similarities before the class period ends. The history, one of many ideas and methods I gleaned from the West Tennessee Writing Project experience, then provides the material for other writing experiences to come.

Each week the students face new writing challenges. Some are formal; many, informal. Some are prose; some, poetry. Some are based on literature; most, on personal experience. Some are to be shared with writing response peers; others, kept deeply personal.

The goals are simple: each student will have the opportunity to learn and to shine in my classroom, and each student will be encouraged to develop a love for writing. I have learned through Geokesha and others since her that if I provide the opportunity and encouragement, the students will usually handle the rest.

Richard Mann is a TC with the West Tennessee Writing Project. He teaches journalism and 11th grade English at South Side High School in Jackson, Tennessee. This piece is reprinted from Field Notes, *the newsletter of the West Tennessee Writing Project.*

The Truth about Lightning Bugs:

What our Children Know

BY KIM PATTERSON

I am driving back to the campus of Mississippi State University from a staff development session in a rural county school some 30 miles from Starkville, Mississippi. Maneuvering the rough-patched asphalt road, I am haunted by a question one second grade teacher had raised during the final few minutes of the session.

It seems as if this woman had been waiting all day to get my response. For several hours I'd been mingling with a group of K-7 teachers. This was the first of ten staff development sessions I would be leading in this Clay County community. I'd listened to these teachers talk during breaks about their children's poor handwriting, the kids they were upset to find were on their class rolls, and the poor conditions in which their students lived. I'd heard very few positive comments about anyone under the age of fourteen all day long.

During the day I had modeled writing process strategies I use in my 6th grade classroom to generate ideas for student writing about a memory, as well as techniques I use to help students revise and edit writing and respond to the writing of others. As I spoke several in the group nodded their heads in agreement, others stared without commitment and still others—like the teacher who asked the question—furrowed their brows and shook their head skeptically.

At the end of the session I stood posed ready to hear how these teachers would apply in their classrooms some of the ideas and strategies I'd presented. That's when the question came. I hadn't expected it, and I certainly did not have the answer that this teacher wanted to hear.

"How can I increase my students' experiences so that they'll have something to write about?" she wanted to know. I stumbled around for an answer, something like, "Oh there are some really great field trip opportunities close by and I can help you with resources for grants or other funds that might be available." But now, driving back to MSU, I realize that I'd certainly not answered her the way I wanted to nor the way I should have.

Her question is on my mind as I drive past open fields where cattle graze peacefully. I see old men sitting on the crumbling porches of decaying stores, whiling away the time, drinking beer and spitting. I pass black children playing makeshift games of baseball in dirt front yards and I drive by shanty houses where colorful curtains flap through open windows. And I begin to construct the answer I should have given.

I should have said, "These students *do* have experiences to write about." True, most have never ridden an escalator, picked up shells on the beach or attended a Broadway production, but they know about planting something in the ground and watching it grow. They know about the harvest season, the specialness of grandmothers, the feel of squishy, black mud between their toes right after a quick June rain, and they know about the quietness of sitting on a front porch watching lightning bugs trying to escape the heat of a late August night. They know the sting of fire ants and the brilliance of early morning. They know the smell of wood smoke and the joy of teasing a crawfish from its hole.

True, in their spoken and written language they rarely use possessive nouns. Their sentences are often fragments or run-ons. They use verbs that don't agree with subjects and they leave off ending sounds of words. But their stories are full of laughter, scenes of family unity and strife, tales of adventure, fear and sorrow. Their experience is of universal human emotions that need to be told whether one lives in rural Mississippi or midtown Manhattan. Our job is to begin where the child is, to help students who know about "ya'll" and "ain't" and speaking and writing in fragments to learn about "you" and "will not" and strong standard English sentences.

I grew up in a rural community 15 miles from the nearest town of 5000 people. My childhood stories were of nights on the back porch eating homemade ice cream, trips to the country store to sell eggs and long, lazy summer days. These are still the stories I have to tell. As my family never visited the Grand Canyon on summer vacations, I did not and do not have the language to describe the Grand Canyon. I can only write about the things I do experience and that I do know.

Once I became part of the MSU Writing/Thinking Project, I was able to use my language to describe my experiences in a safe environment. I realized others wanted to hear my stories. I learned that by engaging in writing as a process and by listening to the response of my colleagues my tentative language could be translated into a firm, more diversified voice that grew out of my experience.

The Truth about Lightning Bugs

I believe the student in our rural classrooms can embark on the same journey. Why are we so concerned so early about what children don't know? Shouldn't we begin by valuing what our students do know? By allowing students to explore in writing the cotton fields and stray dogs and small bedrooms shared with three brothers that are their lives, they may emerge with an increased sense of self-worth, a sense of the value of their own stories, and a new confidence that wills them to dream.

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Some weeks after my workshop, I return to the same Clay County school. I visit two classrooms-side by side, Rooms 29 and 31. Entering Room 29, I am struck by the quietness of these young children. They're all busy writing. "Wonderful," I say to myself. Some pencils scurry across their pages in furious motion, a few children sit wrinkling their little foreheads in thought, and one or two are staring out the window. The teacher tells these students to get busy or they won't finish their stories. Curious about these stories, I wander the rows of desks hoping a few of the students will share their stories with me. When they don't, I peep over a few shoulders at what they're writing. They're all writing about birthday parties. Some pages are blank, others contain only a few lines written about a birthday cake or a bicycle present. I notice no evidence that they've talked about birthdays or celebrations before this moment. No charts, lists, pictures or graphs are on the walls of the room.

As I walk into Room 31, a quiet hum radiates through the room. The students sit in groups of 4 or 5, but right now they seem to be working individually. A few huddle together discussing something, but they're careful not to disturb the rest of the class. The students in this class are also writing. As was true in Room 29, two students stare out the window. However, this behavior doesn't seem to bother their teacher. Some of the huddled groups of children disband and settle into writing individually. Now it seems quieter than when I first entered, but there's still a hum of activity. I again look over the children's shoulders, observing their writing. One student is making a list of kinds, shapes and colors of leaves he has scattered in front of him on the table. Another student is drawing a forest of fall foliage in colors of green, yellow, orange, brown and brilliant red. Another child is well into what appears to be a fictional account of children playing in a fall-colored forest. How did these children come to be writing such different accounts? Then I notice things around the room. There are charts of leaves, pictures of trees in fall, real leaves scattered on two tables and student-made lists of things about fall-colors, temperatures, signs, animals, memories. The room is wallpapered with these lists, written by the teacher, many of them, but obviously created by the students in the room.

The students in Room 29 are the students of the teacher in the staff development session who worried that her students had no experiences, therefore they couldn't write. The students in Room 31 belong to a teacher in that same staff development session, one who didn't voice the concern of her colleague. Why were the students in one room actively engaged in writing while students in the other room struggled to put words on paper? Here's how I see it. The teacher in Room 31 knows that student come to school with valuable experiences to share with her and each other. She knows those kids know something about leaves. Her job, then, becomes to figure out a way to use their knowledge and experiences to help these children learn new things about leaves, or the season of fall, or trees, or fictional stories set in the forest. The teacher knows of the importance of helping students make a personal connection to their learning. To do this she must value her students' experiences.

Like the rest of us who live in this special place, our children are blessed with a rich culture and a beautiful environment. I think about this as I drive to school early in the morning, passing the quilt of cotton fields ready for harvest. I pass field after field, broken only by patches of soy beans or stitched by an occasional stream. In the near distance are house trailers and small wooden-frame houses, their paint peeling and screen doors hanging. I pass a small country store, waved on by a small group of men gathered in front.

Few people in the world know what we who live here know, and we and our children should be allowed to tell our stories.

Kim Patterson is staff development coordinator for the Mississippi State University Writing-Thinking Project.

It Ain't Just Quaint

BY ANNA COLLINS TREST

I am a teacher of writing in a southern elementary school, a vocabulary slaughterhouse where I am only slightly uncomfortable. My days are filled with "dad-gums" and "sam-hills." My nights are haunted by unpleasant dreams of the grammar patrol arriving at my home and carrying me off to the Department of Corrections.

I am a southern ma'am who is conflicted. I have a heritage of unique phrases and picture-painting euphemisms, peculiar only to the South. Juxtapose that heritage with my reverence for traditional English, and the result is a dilemma surpassed only by that of a "snot-nosed youngin' in a short-sleeved shirt."

I like what I hear and what I say, but I vacillate between pride and pique. I glory in the Southernisms of my heritage, and yet I feel compelled to defend them. Something prods me to elevate my language and that of my students above a level that others consider "quaint." I purport that the "yessums" and the "ya'lls" are not merely quaint but somewhat clever and deserving of their rightful place in the linguistic hierarchy. Thus I have written the following explanation, toothsome to those who embrace traditionalism and shudder at anything that dangles.

To Funter

First consider the word "funter," a verb best defined as groping. To say, "the lights were out, and I was just funtering around in the dark" would denote stumbling and fumbling because one could not see clearly. Funtering is also used to mean making an effort and yet wasting time. Mother said, "I funtered around in the kitchen all day and didn't get a thing done." She meant that she accomplished nothing although she was doing something continuously.

Funter can be conjugated, but some tenses such as present perfect or past perfect are rarely used. Future or future perfect are never used because one never plans to funter. As a matter of fact, one rarely knows an activity involved funtering until the activity is finished. The progressive form of the present participle is very useful: We're just funtering around with this project. (Notice that funtering is most effective when preceded by just and followed by around.) I cannot envision an instance when funter would be used as an infinitive, but I do remember a classic use of funter as a gerund. A student once commented, "Mrs. T., funtering is just a way of life for you."

Cotton-Pickin

Now mull over a more familiar southernism: the oft heard "cotton-pickin." "Cotton-pickin is a compound adjective often used as a swear word to enhance, exaggerate, or emphasize an important noun. The steady rhythm of the trochaic feet lends itself to our southern drawl and is pleasurable to the ear.

This word is often chosen rather than a common swear word because it is less offensive and therefore more socially acceptable. The irate Southerner would say, "That boy told a cotton-pickin lie!" In addition to showing anger, this hyphenated gem can also be used to show simple disgust: Tulip Kinsey said, "I can't seem to remember a cotton-pickin thing anymore." Other adjectival examples are as follows:

1. That is a cotton-pickin dog if ever I say one. (Modifier-Subject Complement)

2. That cotton-pickin dog wet my prize-winning begonias. (Modifier-Subject)

3. Then that dog devoured my cotton-pickin begonias. (Modifier-Direct Object)

4. Watch me kick that dog right in the cotton-pickin behind. (Modifier-Object of Preposition)

Alas, even this versatile word cannot be used successfully as a subjective complement. The following would be considered nonstandard: "Your dog's behavior was cotton-pickin."

In standard usage cotton-pickin is never heard in the comparative form, such as, "Your dog is more cotton-pickin than Ralph's dog," said Tom. Occasionally the word is used in the superlative form: "He owned the cotton-pickinest dog I've ever seen." Some non-grammarians even combine two superlative forms in an effort to heighten the effect: "That coon chased that dog through the most cottonpickinest briar patch you ever saw." The preceding would be characterized as a cotton-pickin mistake.

Tookey

A lesser-known example of adjectival phenomena is "tookey" (pronounced two-key). This word of unknown origin implies a substandard state and answers the age-old questions: which one? (the tookey one) and what kind? (the tookey kind). It reeks of a quality not to be envied and is associated with people one would not want

as neighbors, relatives, or coworkers. Tookey could be classified as feminine in gender because only women use the word and only in reference to other women, the behavior of other women, or their belongings. Although the word itself is not scriptural, it is nonetheless sharper than a two-edged sword and designed to cut off its victims at the knees, leaving them shinless, legless, and footless.

Through tacit agreement by generations of genteel women, tookey has come to mean the height of inferiority. It can whisper of some minor behavioral inadequacy as in "That tookey Mavis Magee painted her lips sitting right there at the table in the restaurant in front of God and everybody," or it can indicate a major faux pas as in "Then tookey ol' Mavis refused to allow her own flesh-and blood sister to join the Daughters of the American Convolution even though she knew that she and her sister shared the exact same ancestor, namely General Buford T. Putnam of the Louisiana Putnams. Mavis was just doing it out of spite." In addition, tookey can speak of a more serious breech of etiquette as evidenced by "Lorraine sent a store-bought dessert instead of something homemade to the family of the deceased the day of the funeral. How tookey can a person be? You know she knows better."

Individuals of the grammarian persuasion should note that tookey can be used cumulatively, but because the English language is quite particular about the order of cumulative adjectives, tookey should always come first. "The Blankenbeckleys live in that tookey blue house on the corner." The only exception to the cumulative rule would be when adding the word "plain" as in "That hussy Charla Steinwinder is just plain tookey." In this case tookey would take second place.

Tookey should never be used cumulatively with any evaluative word, even those that seem appropriately derogatory. Evaluative words such as disgusting, appalling, or wretched become merely excess verbiage when coupled with tookey. Once a person, place, or thing has been designated as tookey, any additional assessment, however scathing, would be redundant. Furthermore, be forewarned that adding "ly" would never result in an adverbial form of the word because of the awkwardness in pronunciation, a thing every Southerner strives to avoid.

Yamamanem

Lastly, examine a curiosity among contractions — the efficient, tongue-pleasing "yamamanem." While other contractions are satisfied with joining two words, this unparalleled wonder joins four! And what a four they are! No other word so neatly combines a possessive pronoun, a concrete noun, a coordinating conjunction, and an additional pronoun of the objective case. Thus "your mama and them" is transformed into yamamanem. In a very succinct manner eleven letters and three spaces are reduced to a mere nine letters.

Most Southerners concede that this word lacks the degree of formality usually required in professional writing, but its uniqueness easily compensates for any deficiency. It stands apart in the English language — the lone unpunctuated wonder in a sea of apostrophied friends. Even the earliest southern documents show that yamamanem *never* included the apostrophe usually found in contractions. These documents are testimonials to the historical validity of this grammatical rarity.

It is a lesson in economy as well as grammar, and the lesson becomes even greater. Say the word aloud. Notice how replacing the "th" with "n" removes the need to lift the weary tongue and forcefully thrust it between the teeth. Instead the tongue lazily brushes the palate demonstrating an economy of movement as well.

And so I come to the end of my abbreviated sashay past the ivory towers. I trust that I have defended without being offensive and have elevated without becoming uppity. At the very least I have certainly soothed my conflicted soul and guaranteed myself one good night's sleep.

Anna Collins Trest is an occasionally tookey but never funtering teacher of the gifted at the Star Reach Center for Gifted Studies in the Jones County School System near Laurel, MS. She is a teacher consultant with the South Mississippi Writing Project and recently achieved national certification in Adolescent English Language Arts. Tell yamamanem.

Four Principles Toward Teaching the Craft of Revision

BY MARK FARRINGTON

The beautiful part of writing is that you don't have to get it right the first time, unlike, say, a brain surgeon.

—Robert Cormier

Good writing is essentially revision. I am positive of this.

—Roald Dahl

I consider myself a professional writer. Not because I earn a living writing; I could just about buy a cup of coffee every morning with what my writing has earned—provided I went to 7-11 and not Starbucks. I consider myself a professional writer because I write to publish. For me, a piece isn't truly finished until it's published.

When writing to publish, considerations change. For one thing, the work's "grade" is either A or F. (Or, more gently, P for published or NY for Not Yet.) The writer's standards toughen (an editor will usually consider a piece only once, and I don't want my work rejected based on something I could have fixed before submitting). Most of all, a writer who writes to publish comes to understand the enormous importance of revision. Years may pass between a first draft and publication. Over that time, everything done to a piece of writing is revision.

Many well-known writers are quick to point out how much they love revision:

Revision is one of the pleasures of writing. I love the flowers of afterthought.

—Bernard Malamud

The best part of all, the absolutely most delicious part, is finishing it and then doing it over. That's the thrill of a lifetime for me.... I rewrite a lot, over and over again, so that it looks like I never did it. I try to make it look like I never touched it, and that takes a lot of time and a lot of sweat.

—Toni Morrison

The pleasure IS the rewriting. The first sentence can't be written until the final sentence is written.

—Joyce Carol Oates

As teachers of writing, most of us do understand the value of revision. But that understanding doesn't always make it easier to teach revision to our students. Teaching revision is hard. And recognizing how important revision is to professional writers can make us feel especially frustrated when we struggle trying to teach it to our students.

To understand how best to teach revision, we must begin by looking at how we as writers use revision. I asked a group of teachers in the Northern Virginia Writing Project Summer Institute to think first about a piece of writing they had chosen to revise and one they had chosen not to revise. Why, I asked, did they decide to revise the first and decided once was enough with the next?

The responses I got to the first part of the question didn't surprise me. All the teachers said they chose to revise writings they cared about; they wanted to put in the extra work to make the writing better. After discussion, they also admitted that they knew right off that the piece was good. And when they thought about revision, they had a plan to follow. They would put it away for a while and read it later, or show it to a reading/writing group, or read it aloud, or do some reflective writing.

Their response to the question about writing they'd chosen not to revise offered some surprises. I had expected everyone to say, "my grocery list," but they were, instead, refreshingly candid. Several admitted they had done little or no revision on papers they'd written in college. Why not? I asked. Not enough time was the first reply. Then one teacher admitted, "I didn't care about the topic. I wasn't writing the paper for myself, I was writing it for my professor. And I knew, for him, one draft would be good enough."

These responses suggest the following principles about revision. Revision works best when:

1. The writer believes there is some good in the original piece. For example, when I finished a first draft of a novel, I sent it to a friend, a writer whose opinions I respect greatly. He said, "There are two sections, one of 30 pages, the other of 40 pages, that are definitely the best writing you've ever done, and are, I think, among the best writing I've ever read."

That writer did not speak so glowingly about the other 240 pages of my manuscript, but that was okay. I saw those 70 pages as the foundation to build on. In a sense, I had a responsibility to them, because they were so good. I worked intermittently for five years on that novel, trying to get the rest of the book up to the quality of those 70 pages.

If the writer believes there's nothing good in the piece, the trash basket is the only place

he or she will want to put it. However, if the writer believes there is some good, he or she might just want to work a little harder.

2. The writer believes the writing can be made better.

A writer who believes a piece is perfect, or at least beyond the writer's ability to improve, is not ready to revise. Sometimes all the writer needs is a little time away from the piece, more distance. I tell graduate fiction-writing students that if they feel a story is as good as they can possibly make it, they should send it out to publishers. It might be accepted, but if it's not, time will have passed, enabling the writer to now look at the story more freshly.

Providing time in the classroom is harder, but portfolios allow students to achieve some distance from a piece. At least there's a better chance students will start revising closer to the time they are ready to revise. Without that time, the task falls to a peer or teacher to convince the writer that the piece can be better. Small groups or even whole-class workshops are best for this. Hearing four or 24 voices saying similar things carries weight. When the suggestions must come from the teacher, the role that teacher has chosen to play becomes paramount. Is the teacher judge or helper? Students are much more apt to listen to a teacher they view as someone who genuinely wants to help with improving a piece of writing.

3. The writer has some reason to make it better.

Whether it be pride, a grade, or publication, revision is hard work, and everyone needs a reason to do it. Sometimes that reason might be practice. Teaching revision sometimes means practicing the techniques of revision. Exercises like "write the beginning of your story from a different point of view, just to see if you can do it" or "find a place other than the first sentence where this essay might begin," are valuable because they show student writers the possibilities that exist in writing. Writing is flexible and alive, and most often the result

of decisions the writer has made, consciously or not. Realizing that they have the power to go back and change decisions, and witnessing the consequences of those changes is a valuable experience for all writers to have.

Practice can sometimes turn to play. Ask students to:

—add five colors
—add four action verbs
—add three sensory details
—add two transitional words or phrases
—add one metaphor

If students can't do this with their own work, have them exchange pieces and try.

In my fiction writing class, I have students choose a spot in the story where the main character does something that is crucial to the rest of the story. At that moment, I tell them, you must make the character do the exact opposite.

The first time I tried this, one of my students noisily agonized all through the exercise. When he finished I asked, "What happened?" "I couldn't do it," he replied. He explained that he had chosen the moment when the main character climbed over a wall. "What he discovers on the other side of the wall sets the whole story in motion," my student protested. " If he doesn't climb over the wall, there's no story."

"I didn't say he couldn't climb over the wall," I told him. "I said that in the moment at which he now climbs over the wall, he has to do the exact opposite. So let's see. Instead of climbing over the wall, he looks at it and thinks, There's no way I'm climbing over that stupid wall. He turns his back and walks away from it. But he feels something pulling at him, something he can't explain; it's even a little frightening. It's as if something on the other side of the wall is calling out to him. 'Hell,' he says, and feeling foolish, he runs up and climbs over the wall."

What happened in revision? The pace of the story has slowed, at a moment when it probably should have slowed. The act of climbing over the wall has become more significant, both for the reader and the main character. And we've learned a little bit about the main character we wouldn't have known had he simply come upon the wall and climbed over.

Playing at revision can often bring these kind of surprises. When they come, revision doesn't seem such hard work anymore.

4. The writer has some plan for figuring out how to make it better.

I may know the piece can be improved and want very badly to improve it, but if I don't know how to go about doing that I'll be frustrated and lost. At this point the teacher's role may become critical. The solution here is to teach techniques of revision and provide reading/writing groups and teacher comments that will help the writer learn how to improve the writing.

When these four principles exist, revision works best. One responsibility of the teacher, then, is to try to create ways for these four principles to be present as often as possible for student writers. And, conversely, not to expect substantial revision when they are not there. Not everything needs to be revised, but a writer—professional or student—who knows he or she has written something of value, who cares about writing it well, who believes it can be better, and who has the knowledge, tools, and resources to figure out how—such a writer is ready to fall in love with the craft of revision.

Mark Farrington is a TC with the Northern Virginia Writing Project and teaches undergraduate writing at George Mason University and fiction writing in the Part-time Graduate Writing Program of Johns Hopkins University.

Teaching the Most Important Things

By Donald Gallehr

At the end of each semester, I collect student portfolios to read and grade, then stack them in boxes and file cabinets. Those who want their portfolios back pick them up at the beginning of the next semester. Between semesters I browse through them, searching for clues that tell me how to improve my teaching. Then, days before the start of classes, I revise my syllabus. Sometimes changes are major, but mostly they are refinements.

This time I looked at my syllabus and realized that the most important things I teach are the foundation of everything else. At first I thought of them as intangibles, but the more I recalled my classes, the more I realized that even when the lessons are amorphous, results are tangible. They show up as intense quiet when someone is reading, as great noise when everyone is talking at once, as the close, face-to-face position of chairs in response groups, as a smile on the writer who has finally got it, as students coming early and leaving late, and as erupting, spontaneous applause.

I teach freshmen who are required to take English 101—some of whom have squeezed out of high school just as some of my students squeeze out of college. I also teach juniors and seniors who work as interns in corporations hoping to make a career of writing—any kind of writing. And then I teach graduate students who may some day teach, as well as teachers who want to be better teachers of writing. Some of my students are, by college standards, basic writers, and some of these are international students who still struggle with English. Others are intelligent in ways other than verbal—such as athletes, dancers, computer whizzes, musicians, and accountants. And some of my students are truly talented writers who on their own are writing film scripts, family histories, and novels.

Regardless of who I teach or at what level I teach, the most import things I teach are the same—love of writing, learning the writer's mind, fitting the writing into your dream, and building on what works.

1. Love the Writing

It's now hard for me to imagine my teaching writing for thirteen years before discovering my own love of writing, but that's exactly what happened. I had chosen the Civil War as my topic of interest for the 1978 Northern Virginia Writing Project Summer Institute, and one of my four points of view was a short story about a soldier from New York in the battle of Second Manassas. The soldier had been in the war for over a year and was again facing a major defeat. Like some of the soldiers in the real war, this one decided it was time to quit—so in the middle of the deafening fire of muskets and cannon, he slipped unnoticed into the woods.

It didn't matter that I was not a very good writer, or that I was an ignorant writer of fiction, because over time, practice would improve my writing. What mattered was that I was caught up in saying something that mattered to me.

Students are not able to write short stories in 101 or 489, Advanced Non-Fiction Writing, because these are nonfiction courses. But they can, and do, select topics that they can write passionately about, topics that will consume them as the Civil War consumed me. Catherine wrote about crew, a sport that triggers her endorphins and makes her life healthy. Madeleine wrote about the Women's Center in Vienna where she found sanctuary after an abusive relationship. Matt wrote about being a Vegan and tried to convince his response group to become vegetarians.

How do I teach this? By asking them to write about things that really interest them. If I get a sense that they're selecting topics that are easy, ones they've written about before, or ones that might impress or satisfy others, I bring them back with questions such as, "What do you really want to write about?" I also tell them that this class is a rare opportunity, and for some of them, their last opportunity, to spend a semester writing about things they're really interested in. Not all my students like to write, especially my freshmen. But they do love writing about the topic that consumes them. I figure that if they can have at least one such experience with writing, they can repeat it.

2. Learn Your Writer's Mind

James Moffett advocated writing as one means of watching our thoughts, of getting a grasp on our inner speech. He also advocated suspending inner speech as a way to higher knowledge. By letting go of chatter, other sections of our brains can function, including intuition and holistic thinking. Furthermore, suspending inner speech also gives our minds a rest, and we come back to the writing refreshed. The fresh mind writes with little or no impediment, achieving a "depth and fluency,"

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Moffett says, "that writing teachers should pay attention to..." Even for those of us who are naturally nonverbal, suspending repetitious activity gives us a rest.

I talk about the writer's mind in my classes—I talk of how I handle distractions, how I respond to fears and desires, how I bring my mind back to the writing each time it wanders off. Of course, I also tell students that I sometimes follow an impulse that pulls me away from the writing. I show them my writer's mind by writing on the board and talking aloud as I write. I show them drafts of pieces I am working on so that they will know my triumphs and struggles.

I sit next to them when they write in class, to listen and ask them questions when I think their answers would reveal to them their writer's mind. I collect a process log from them each week as they submit a new or substantially revised draft. I sit in on their response groups, and I read their portfolio prefaces. I go to class early and leave late, strike up conversations about their writing topics, school, campus parties and politics. It takes about a month before I know them well enough to really teach, to guide them so that they, too, will become aware of how their minds work when they write.

I give them exercises that expand their writer's mind—intuition exercises with holistic questions such as, "What does this writing want to become?" I give them clearing the mind exercises which I call "worry sheets," and encourage them to clear their minds before they begin each writing session and whenever necessary throughout the writing. Of course there are times when they can't, when life is so upsetting that they are overwhelmed, when their jobs or girlfriends and boyfriends, family emergencies and illness make it difficult to concentrate. I tell them to pay attention to the upset, and if appropriate, write about it as part of a larger, ongoing topic. I tell them to work it through, if possible—and sometimes I urge them to talk to the people involved.

By the end of the semester, I hope they can watch their thoughts, watch the movement of their writer's mind, label their thoughts, and let them go so that they can return to the writing. Those who can, stay with the writing for longer and longer periods of time, and access more complex and sophisticated ideas and images.

3. Fit the Writing Into Your Dream

I'm writing this on the 35th anniversary of the March On Washington and the "I Have a Dream" speech of Martin Luther King, Jr. Most of us have at least one dream—that large wish that we are drawn to, that guiding image that urges us to say "yes" here and "no" there, that thought we return to when we have a moment by ourselves.

I usually don't require my students to write about their dreams—I simply ask them, "What do you want to do with your life?" Their answers include: write for a specific publication, be a good parent, sail around the world, fly an airplane, eradicate world hunger, clean up the environment, write comic books, become a teacher. Of course, I also have the occasional, "I don't know."

When my students write about their dream, they do some of their most powerful writing. Because a dream is something they have thought about over a period of time, they have done a fair amount of "research" about the topic and are usually eager to do more. And because they are connecting the writing to themselves, they find these pieces easier to write.

Michelle, for example, was born in Nova Scotia, lived for a brief while in Arizona, and wants to live in Arizona after she graduates. She flew to Phoenix during spring break to find her childhood home, and even though she couldn't find it, she has no doubt that she wants to live there more than anything else. Writing about this experience has sharpened her understanding of where her dream came from and why it is so strong. Jennifer, after a one-year struggle with anorexia and bulimia, wants to stay healthy and at all costs avoid situations which would trigger binge eating and purging. Writing for the first time about her struggles and reading her writing to her response group has strengthened her writing and her resolve.

4. Build on What Works

The writer is particularly interested in what works, since most effective writing is built from extending and reinforcing the positive elements in a piece of writing.

—Donald Murray

Finding the positive works better than any other way of looking at a draft. It doesn't do any good for me or the student to treat a first draft to a slather of red ink. Better we

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Cat Watching: Six Easy Steps to Classroom Poetry

By Scott Peterson

One day I was sitting in the window of a downtown cafe savoring my morning coffee when I realized that a cat in the upstairs window of the house across the street was staring at me.

It was an orange and white tabby, stretched out flat in the window sill, its fluffy head taking in the street scene below. Relaxed yet observant, it would gaze placidly at the world, then jerk around quickly to catch an interesting movement or respond to an unusual sound.

While I continued to sip my coffee, the cat and I continued our leisurely surveillance of the world as it unfolded before our eyes. Occasionally, our eyes would lock into a stare until one of us broke off contact and we would once again continue our meditations. It didn't take me long to realize that the cat and I had a lot in common.

We were doing the same thing. Both of us were taking in our world, drinking in every detail around us. We had opened every pore to the world, so that every sound, every noise, every smell, every taste entered our consciousness. I was as contented, as satisfied, as that cat in the window sill, and rarely have I ever felt more alive or aware of the world than I did at that particular moment.

It was poetry that put me in that cat-like state of mind. I had been studying poetry, reading poetry, writing poetry, listening to poetry presentations during the Third Coast Summer Writing Institute. Immersing my soul in poetry opens up my senses. I see more, smell more, feel more when under the influence of poetry. The grass is a little greener, the sky a little bluer, the rain a little sweeter when I make room for poetry in my life. I notice things that normally would slip out of my life unobserved, like that fat tabby cat staring at me in the window across the street.

We need to make room for poetry in our schools, to bring this same heightened sense of awareness that is induced by heavy doses of poetry into our classrooms. Most of us are intimidated by poetry, frightened by its form and rhyme schemes. We feel that the rules are locked behind closed doors, and only those select few who have the keys can play the poetry game.

The grass is a little greener, the sky a little bluer, the rain a little sweeter when I make room for poetry in my life. I notice things that normally would slip out of my life unobserved, like that fat tabby cat staring at me in the window across the street.

Not true. Anyone who loves to mess around with words can write poetry. Poet Michael Carey points out that anyone is capable of being a good poet, provided that they love words and are willing to work at it.

For those of us who need an additional nudge, activities such as the following, adapted from Barry Lane's *After the End*, are well suited to poetry. The words generated from these exercises tend to fit naturally into poetic form. Try these steps yourself to see what I mean.

1. First, think of a subject you know well. It can be a living thing such as a pet, family member, or best friend. It can also be an inanimate object such as a stuffed animal or your bedroom. The only requirement is that it is something you know and care about deeply. I chose to write about another cat, my pet cat Poco.

2. Next, list five general characteristics about your subject. My quick list looks like this: soft fur, friendly, playful, silly, little.

3. Pair up with a partner. The partners take turns asking questions that bring out concrete details and images about the subject. I had no partner but generated these questions based on my general descriptions:

soft fur- What color fur?
Is it a short hair or long hair? What does the fur feel like?
friendly- How does it show it has a friendly personality?
playful- What playful things does your cat do?
little- Is it a kitten or a full grown cat? How old?
silly- Tell me something silly about your cat.

4. While the partner is asking questions, the author is immediately responding in writing with concrete, specific answers to the questions. Here are my answers to my own questions:

fur- orange, black, and white. Short hair. Fuzzy like a dandelion.
friendly- It follows me around and

Six Easy Steps to Classroom Poetry

weaves in between my feet. Purrs loudly. Jumps in my lap whenever I sit down.

playful- Darts around like a streak of lightning, hides under papers and in baskets.

silly - Chases its own tail.

5. Write a prose piece about your subject incorporating all the concrete details and images generated by the question and answer period in step four.

My prose piece came out like this:

I open the door and my new little kitten Poco pops out like a cork from a champagne bottle. She circles and weaves between my feet as we move into the family room, barely missing death by being smooched by my size 11 feet. I sit at my computer to begin my day's work and she is in my lap before I can settle my fanny into the chair. She is a calico and her orange and black fur tickle my bare legs while I work at the word processor. She pushes her head against my fingers as I rub the space between her ears and she breaks into a ferocious fit of purring. She shakes and rattles so much that you can see the vibration rings in the coffee cup that is sitting on my desk.

Out of the corner of her eye she sees her long tail flip into the air and she is on it like a hunk of raw fish. She attacks it violently, batting it around and chomping on its tip until she slowly and painfully realizes, with a look of surprise in her eyes, that she has been chewing on a piece of her own body. Not exactly the smartest cat in the world, but I think I'll keep her anyway.

6. The concrete details and images generated by this activity make the writing that comes out of it an ideal candidate for a poem. By experimenting with line breaks, the prose can easily evolve into a poem. My prose piece turned into this:

SELF-ABUSE
By Scott Peterson

I open the door to the basement and
my new little kitten pops out
like a cork off a champagne bottle.
She circles and weaves between my ankles,
defying death from being flattened by
my size 11 feet and
attaches herself to my toes
like a pair of furry slippers as
we move into the kitchen.

She is in my lap before
my fanny settles into my chair and
her orange and black fur tickles my
bare legs while I sip my morning coffee.
She pushes her head against my fingers
as I stroke the space between her ears,
breaking into a ferocious fit of purring,
rattling and shaking
and stirring up little rings of vibrations
in the cup on the kitchen table.

Out of the corner of her eye
she sees her long, black tail
flip up in the air and
is on it like a hunk of raw fish.
She attacks violently,
batting it around and
chomping on its tip
until, with a look of surprise in her eyes,
she realizes she is chewing
on a piece
of her own body.

Using my process as a model, my students jumped into the poem-writing business themselves. Tom, a fourth grader in my class, wanted to write about his new baby sister, Josie. He began by listing five general characteristics about Josie: smart, sweet, loving, funny and little. Tom's partner then asked the questions about Josie's characteristics; responding to the questions of his partner brought some powerful images to the surface and into Tom's prose draft:

Baby Josie is smart because she can smile already and she is only one week old and it normally takes a baby six weeks to smile. And when I put a toy bus on her lap she pushes it of. She is sweet because she stares at you for about 5 minutes. She is loving because when I stick my finger in her hand she clutches it tight and sometimes it hurts. She is so little that she could fit in Robyn's doll clothes. And she is funny because she doesn't cry properly. It sounds like a car running out of gas. And she is also funny because her eyes dart around, and she is taking everything in. And she is also funny because she sticks her tongue out at me.

As Tom and I conferenced about his paragraph, we highlighted the best lines and boiled down the prose so that only the most powerful details and images remained. Out of these details, Tom set up line breaks and came up with his poem:

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Baby Josie
by Tom Crane

Only one week old and
can already smile.
She clutches my finger so hard
sometimes it hurts.
Her eyes dart around
taking everything in.
She is so small she could
fit in a doll's clothes.
When she cries is sounds like a car
running out of gas.
I love my new sister as much as a lion
loves its cubs.

Poetry is far too important to leave outside our classroom doors. Our students are loaded with the images, ideas, and concrete details needed to produce poetry. We need only allow a little inspiration, supplemented by a touch of technique, and soon our students will be producing poems faster than we can read them.

Reference

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Scott Peterson is a TC with the Third Coast Writing Project and teaches 4th grade at Mattawan Elementary School in Mattawan, MI. This piece is reprinted from the Third Coast Writing Project Newsletter.

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should read through and look for parts that work, even if there is only one. We can then set aside the rest and head into draft two. Over time, the writing takes shape and the meaning emerges.

There are those rare times when a first draft works. Then the writer can go directly into editing. But those are truly rare occasions. Most of the time, even with considerable mapping and thinking, and even for accomplished writers, the first draft needs revision. First drafts are for the writer, later drafts are for the reader, and one way of knowing you have a final draft is when the ego of the writer has been worked out of the writing. In an earlier draft of this article, I wrote, "Perhaps we are a measure of our dreams." It sounds great, doesn't it, almost Shakespearean. But I didn't know what it meant. I think I was saying that there seems to be a connection between people who dream large dreams and people whom we consider larger than life. Once I figured that out, I realized it had nothing to do with my article and the reader would not benefit from hearing it.

Selecting only those things that work in a draft is also positive. I tell my students that writing is such a difficult activity that we need all the encouragement we can get. Selecting what works conserves and focuses our energies on building, not destroying.

These most important things guide my teaching and help me to stay focused. Under them I teach things as large as how to write a book and as small as where to place a comma. I want my students to have their own "most important things" and I hope theirs will be as large.

Don Gallehr is director of the Northern Virginia Writing Project. This article is reprinted from the Newsletter of the Northern Virginia Writing Project.

Partial Successes and Limited Failures:

Recognizing the Dissonances in our Teacherly Talk

BY JANE GREER

On a Thursday afternoon last fall, I sat through a particularly painful meeting with a group of my English department colleagues. We had assembled to discuss revising the writing course we offer for students interested in pursuing careers in business. The meeting became heated as some of my colleagues spoke passionately about the need to help students develop a "critical literacy" that would empower them to analyze, critique, and strategically challenge the role writing can play in maintaining existing corporate power structures. Other colleagues spoke equally passionately about the immediate economic needs of many of the students at our public, urban university, and they urged us to design a course that would provide students with an opportunity to master the conventions of the memos, letters, reports, and résumés that are traditionally used to communicate information in the business world. Rather than seizing the chance for a productive dialogue, we allowed the meeting to degenerate into an ugly series of monologues in which everyone essentially claimed, "My politics are more righteous than yours; I am the one who truly has students' best interests at heart." The meeting ended with everyone feeling bruised and a little battered, and the existing business writing course, which satisfied no one, remained unchanged.

After the meeting, I was only too eager to pack up my book bag and flee the acrimony that hung in the hallway. As I headed across the parking lot to my car, I decided to treat myself to a quiet evening of reading—no raised voices, no hurt feelings, no painful charges among good friends and colleagues about who was the "bad" teacher. I would push aside the papers that needed grading—after all, I could just work extra hard over the weekend to make sure I got them back to my sophomore writing students on Monday. And besides, so many teachers that I knew through my work with Greater Kansas City Writing Project had been telling me that I just had to read Regie Routman's *Literacy at the Crossroads*. They had talked about how uplifting Routman's work was and gave credit to her for inspiring them to do things like initiate public portfolio exhibitions of their students' work and to write op-ed pieces on educational issues for local newspapers. On that Thursday evening, I thought Routman's book might be just the thing to chase away the despair I was feeling after the painful meeting about the business writing course.

At home, I pulled on a comfortable old pair of sweats and a ratty flannel shirt, and I settled into the corner of my couch with *Literacy at the Crossroads*. From the pages of her book, Routman exhorted me to "celebrate and publicize" my classroom "successes" and my "constant striving to do ...[my] best for ....[my] students" (xvi). After all, as Routman says, "if we don't tell our 'good news,' no one is going to do it for us" (xvi). Dismayed that administrators and political leaders, who spend little time with kids in classrooms, are shaping the public discussions about issues like ebonics, whole language vs. phonics, national standards, English Only classrooms, and mainstreaming, Routman went on to talk about how teachers need "to move beyond our classrooms and schools into the wider public arena to state our case" (xvii). While part of me wanted to cheer enthusiastically and say "Yes! Yes!" to all that Routman argued, I could not chase the angry voices of my colleagues out of my head that evening. I wondered: How can we, as teachers, publicly celebrate our "successes" and those of our students when we can barely maintain a veneer of civility during a 90-minute meeting about revising a single writing course? How can we possibly enter public debates about literacy education when conversations amongst ourselves become so heated and unproductive? Why is it that discussions of educational issues, even among fellow teachers, so quickly become antagonistic and seemingly produce such self righteousness among teachers whom I know to be generous, thoughtful, and tolerant people?

Troubled by such questions, I've turned in the past year to various sources in my search for answers. I've initiated one-on-one conversations with colleagues at my institution and at other schools, asking them why antagonism and accusations seem to creep so easily into conversations among teachers about how best to serve students' needs. I've begun reading more widely, studying the work of feminist scholars on strategies for collaboration and coalition building; of political scientists on the concepts of community and public dialogue; of educational researchers on the issues surrounding teachers' involvement in

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Marian Wharton

school reform. Surprisingly, though, I have found the most satisfying answers to my questions by traveling back in time to study the teaching life of another educator, a woman named Marian Wharton who helped found a correspondence school (The People's College) for working-class students in 1914 in Fort Scott, Kansas.

Initially I viewed my historical research as entirely separate from my quest to understand why conversations among teachers become so fractious, but my study of Wharton's work as an educator has lead me to a richer understanding of how our teaching lives are a complex interweaving of free choice and restricted options, of accomplishment and failure, of strategic alliances and subtle antagonisms. Wharton operated outside the traditional educational system at a site where empowering working-class students was the explicit goal of writing instruction. She experimented freely with innovative teaching techniques and undertook serious curricular revisions to meet her students' needs. Her textbook, *Plain English*, speaks directly to working-class students, acknowledging that traditional education has not served them well and encouraging them to understand that the power of language is a resource available to all people. But I also found fascinating tensions in Wharton's work. Although Wharton was committed to helping working class students, her assumptions about the kinds of language that will be most effective in the struggle for social justice place her in a strange alliance with more conservative educators from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Because of these complexities, I cannot summarize Wharton's work in a singular, tidy narrative. Instead, I would like to share two separate, equally valid stories of Wharton's work as a teacher: one story that acknowledges her attempts to help her students develop their critical thinking skills and another story that highlights how she simultaneously encouraged compliance and conformity. I believe that in these multiple, messy stories of Wharton's efforts at the People College's lie new understandings of the challenges we face as teachers. More importantly, these interdependent narratives of Wharton's work have helped me understand the complexities in my own stories of teaching and have provided me with new strategies for listening to the classroom stories that others tell. My study of Wharton's teaching life has lead me to believe that by acknowledging that our teaching practices are inevitably shot through with inconsistencies and contradictions, we can move away from sharply polarized positions and shift our conversations toward a middle ground where productive dialogue is possible. And as we begin to think about answering Routman's call and making our classroom stories part of public discussions about literacy and education, we need to find ways to represent the richness and complexity of teaching, rather than presenting our work as entirely unified and controlled. Only then, I believe, can we begin to defuse some of the volatility that has generated more heat than light in public debates about education.

Marian Wharton and the People's College

Born in Bedford, Iowa, in 1877, Mayme (Marian) Lucy was a smart, bookish child. Though mocked by her brothers and cautioned that she would "never find a husband," Marian enrolled at Drake University in 1894 (Le Sueur, 1984, p. 39). A year before she would have graduated, eighteen-year-old Marian married William Wharton, a Disciples of Christ minister. The couple eventually settled in Texas, but Marian refused to remain in an unhappy marriage where she and her children were considered the property of her husband. In the middle of the night, she fled with her three children over the state line to Perry, Oklahoma, where her mother lived. William Wharton eventually divorced Marian on the grounds that she read "dangerous literature" (Le Sueur, 1984, p. 41).

To support her family, Wharton began offering public lectures on women's rights, suffrage, and birth control (Allen, 1994, p. 120). On the lecture circuit, she met the leaders of many of the radical political groups of the Progressive Era. In 1914, Wharton joined with some of these leaders—Eugene Debs, Charles Steinmetz,

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and Arthur Le Sueur—to launch the People's College in Fort Scott, Kansas. As a correspondence school, the People's College used the U.S. postal service to offer courses that included English, Law, Arithmetic, Algebra, Shorthand and Typing, Bookkeeping, and Penmanship. In the second year of its existence, the college was able to report that over 4,000 students were enrolled in various courses. Over 2,000 students were enrolled in the English course alone. For three years, Wharton helped lead the college. She served on the advisory board, edited its newsletter, and wrote the textbook for the beginning English course.

The founders of the People's College wanted its working-class students to be able to tap into the power of language and to be able to write and speak effectively in union meetings, at political rallies, at local school board meetings, and in other public arenas.

Story One: *Plain English* and Critical Literacy

The founders of the People's College wanted its working-class students to be able to tap into the power of language and to be able to write and speak effectively in union meetings, at political rallies, at local school board meetings, and in other public arenas. Marian Wharton was called upon to design a course that would help achieve this goal, and she produced a textbook, *Plain English*, to serve as the course's foundation. For $12.50, a student would receive a copy of *Plain English* with its 30 lessons, beginning with "Nouns and Verbs" and proceeding through "Sentence Building" and "Punctuation." Each lesson also included a spelling section with 30 words to be learned each week. To introduce each lesson, Wharton composed a letter addressing the student as "Dear Comrade." Described by Wharton as "our weekly talks together," these letters offered encouragement to the student and provided Wharton with an opportunity to explain her instructional theories.

Although *Plain English* is organized around the parts of speech and basic sentence structure, Wharton says in the first lesson that the course's purpose "is not to make you a grammarian, versed in the knowledge of rules and reasons, but to give you the power to express yourself more readily, fluently, and correctly—in other words to speak and write good English" (1917, p. 9). Aware that traditional schools and methods of instruction had not given the readers of *Plain English* this power of ready, fluent, and correct expression, Wharton frequently addresses the unique needs of working-class students and attempts to frame the work of the course in terms familiar to them. The short, numbered paragraphs and brief lessons are designed for students who "will spend most of the day trying to meet bare subsistence needs" (p. 310). Recognizing the need to link the struggles of daily existence that occupied most of the students' waking hours with their educational work, Wharton uses familiar references in her lessons: keeping a notebook in which to complete one's lessons is likened to a mechanic having a workshop (p. 10), and prepositions are the nuts and bolts that hold sentences together (p. 190).

While *Plain English* thus speaks to the lives of working-class students, its lessons are also explicitly intended to empower these students much in the way today's advocates of "critical literacy" might approve. In both the sentence-level exercises and the longer excerpts which students are asked to analyze in order to understand grammatical principles, *Plain English* carries messages of class consciousness and social critique. In early lessons on identifying complete sentences, the exercise sentences include: "The workers of the world build palaces for other people" and "Lo! Women are working and claiming their own" (p. 14; p. 20). In a later lesson, students are asked to complete partial sentences like: "The great need of the working class is . . ." and "By the sweat of no other's brow shalt thou eat . . ." (p. 54).

Longer passages in Plain English come from authors like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Walt Whitman, Olive Schreiner, and Abraham Lincoln, and students are asked to analyze these passages for grammatical lessons. One lesson even asks students to identify every part of speech (nouns, pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions, conjunctions, and verbs) in three paragraphs from *The Communist Manifesto* (pp. 274-275).

While the exercises and reading passages in *Plain English* reflect Wharton's commitment to bringing a unique curriculum to working-class students, she recognized that

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deeper pedagogical innovations were necessary. The first of these innovations involved focusing on the principles of language use rather than on rules of grammatical correctness. The Foreword to *Plain English* explains this focus on principles and draws the following analogy:

> *A mechanic may learn every detail of every rule for the construction of a steam engine, but if he lacks the understanding of the principles which give rise to the rules, they will avail nothing and his work must fail. If, however, he understands the principles involved, his work will stand the test, though he has no knowledge of rules as such.*
>
> *In teaching the English language, the rules have been stressed, while the principles have been submerged, so that the teaching of rules has not resulted in the improvement of the student.* (Plain English, np)

In *Plain English*, students thus learn principles governing standard English conventions rather than merely lists of conventions that students must memorize. For example, Wharton does not merely list rules for capitalization, but instead instructs students that capital letters are used to help readers recognize the most important words on a page. Another of Wharton's strategies to reveal the principles behind grammatical rules and terms is to offer etymological explanations of the names of different parts of speech. In explaining adjectives, she notes:

> *Adjective is a word derived from the Latin. It comes from the Latin word ad, meaning to, and the Latin word jecto, which means to throw; hence an adjective is a word thrown to or added to a noun.* (p. 28)

By working to help *Plain English* students understand the principles behind the accepted conventions of language use, Wharton hopes to liberate students from the "useless worship of rules," and she feels that only by understanding the principles could students effectively participate in "questioning the utility of authority [and] ...the utility of institutions" (np). Just as the ultimate goal of the People's College was to promote such independent, critical thinking, so too did *Plain English* discourage students from accepting the status quo. As Wharton reminded her students,

> *You are studying English that you may be able to say and write the things you think. So first of all, think, think! That is your unalienable right! Do not accept anything just by blind belief.* (p. 88)

Never missing an opportunity to stress to students that they should be critically interrogating the social structures that leave them on the economic margins of society, Wharton even uses a punctuation lesson to observe that

> *The interrogation mark is the most important punctuation mark. Asking questions is the source of all knowledge. The natural child is an animated interrogation point—full of questions. Cultivate questioning in yourself.* (p. 311)

More, though, than merely questioning the world around them, Wharton wanted the working-class students to understand that they could shape the world around them. To achieve this sense of empowerment, *Plain English* explains the historical development of language and emphasizes that students can help shape the future of our continually evolving language. In her "Dear Comrade" letters, Wharton paints a "history of the alphabet" in broad strokes. She notes that ancient peoples supposed writing to have a divine origin and that this belief is understandable because it is natural to personify and envelope in mystery things we don't understand, just as the Romans assumed that thunder and lightening was sent from Jove. In the early stages of literacy, then, reading and writing became the province of an elite class of priests and clergymen who kept writing for themselves.

Wharton wants her students to understand that they have a role to play in shaping the future of the language.

By limiting the access to literacy, these favored few enslaved the common people, according to Wharton. For her, the true emancipation for the world came with the invention of the printing press in the 15th century (p. 106). Wharton argues that as Gutenberg's press helped literacy spread beyond the elite classes, languages became more dynamic and evolved more rapidly to meet the needs of the people, including the working class.

Since language has become increasingly changeable, Wharton wants her students to understand that they have a role to play in shaping the future of the language. She tells

them that "The study of language [is] ...an absorbing study of a living, growing, changing thing that mirrors forth the very life of man" and that the working class must participate in "writing history in words—adding new words (brotherhood, justice) and giving old words richer meaning" (p. 18).

Part of the remarkable legacy Wharton leaves for us today, then, is a model of literacy instruction that reflects a keen awareness of the unique experiences of a student population that has not been well served by conventional schooling. But equally fascinating are the sites of tension in Wharton's work: places where the priorities of the world beyond the People's College seem to determine what she imagines is possible and desirable for her students, and other places where her assumptions about the most effective writing strategies for engaging in the class struggle interrupt her attempts to create a curriculum that would empower the working class. *Plain English* is actually a complex interweaving of resistance to and compliance with the traditions of standard grammar.

Story Two: *Plain English* Encourages Conformity

According to Robert Connors, an obsession with mechanical correctness dominated writing instruction around the turn of the century. A growing immigrant population, changes in college entrance exams, and the nearly horrific workload under which English teachers labored fueled this obsession. Instructional materials on mechanical correctness proliferated, giving rise to what Connors has termed "The Great Handbook Boom" of 1907-1927. The purpose of all these handbooks and the instruction in the mechanical features of writing that they offer was to ensure the production of student writing that is easily and quickly read.

With its 30 lessons on topics such as the inflection of verbs, participles and infinitives, and adjective clauses, *Plain English* similarly focuses students' attention on the mechanical aspects of producing clear and easily accessible texts. Though Wharton discounts the study of grammar and encourages her students to "strive for effective expression" (p. 41), the criteria for effectiveness in Plain English is ultimately the absence of error. Throughout *Plain English,* warnings about mechanical errors are interwoven with Wharton's statements about liberating students from useless rules. Wharton particularly cautions students against incorrectly using "the s-form of verbs": *I goes, we farms, they buys* (p. 61); using nonstandard pronouns such as *hern, hisself,* and *ourn* (p. 131); using "them" as an adjective, such as *them books,* and *them men* (p. 156); and using "ain't" (p. 107). Continually reiterating that "[c]ommon blunders in use of English mark us as careless or uneducated" (p. 61), Wharton places the *Plain English* students in a state of constant watchfulness against errors.

Furthermore, if it is mechanical correctness that marks a speaker or writer as educated, it is also an absence of error that makes a writer persuasive. Though profoundly committed to the class struggle, Wharton suggests that by complying with the rules of standard English, one is able to speak convincingly on the issues vital to the working class. She tells her students:

> *All of these mistakes take time to overcome, but the result is worth the effort for even those about us who will not take the pains or give the required time and effort to acquiring an education for themselves, will give greater heed to the speech of those who do speak correctly, and will readily acknowledge the leadership of those who have given the time and effort to self-development.* (p. 131)

Wharton does acknowledge the sense of social dislocation many students experience as they sacrifice the language of their communities and move toward the standard, polished usage which Wharton links to further intellectual development. In one lesson, she encourages students to repeat aloud the correct forms of the verb "to be," but then she adds: "Don't think this is putting on airs. It is not. It is simply demanding the best for yourself in words" (p. 121). She also reminds students: "Don't fear being a highbrow. Demand the best for yourself" (p. 309). She places them in a position to either accept the standard language and advance their cognitive abilities or reject it and remain ignorant.

Part of the disturbing legacy Wharton leaves for teachers, then, is a model of how even the most progressive educational agendas can inadvertently cooperate with conservative interests in the broader culture. But this second story of how *Plain English* disciplines its working-class students is most interesting only when placed in relation to the first story of how *Plain English* empowers its students. Rather than attempting to "salvage" Wharton's teacherly agenda by either integrating my

two contrasting stories of her work or to "fix" the contradictions by ultimately privileging one story over the other, I believe the value of these coexisting stories and their tensions lies in what they reveal about the challenges teachers face, regardless of whether they are working with students in the first decades of the 20th century or in the final decade of the 20th century.

In addressing her various audiences and their multiple needs, Wharton shifted among contradictory positions: encouraging working-class students to seize control of language, yet disciplining their unruly language practices so that critics of the labor movement could not dismiss them as ignorant; helping to define the mission of the People's College as an institution that would teach students how to think, yet developing an English textbook that fits into the tradition of grammar guides that ask students only to fill in blanks; offering pointed critiques of the traditional educational establishment, yet designing a pedagogy that would the allow working-class students to sound as though they too had spent years at in the classroom. In constructing two coexisting stories of Wharton's work, my goal has been to foreground how her teaching life was a blend of new visions and old problems, partial successes and limited failures.

Conclusion

By allowing such multiple and contradictory stories of teaching and learning to coexist, I believe we can begin to have more balanced discussions about language instruction both with our colleagues and in public arenas. Just as Wharton's voice in *Plain English* moves among a range of radical and conservative registers that reflect her personal commitments as well as broader influences, so too our own teacherly talk is never fully our own: it is freighted with competing languages, some of which may reverberate at frequencies so low and subtle we may have difficulty hearing them ourselves. When we deny this complexity in our talk about teaching and instead represent our work with students as perfectly consistent, coherent, and contained, we oversimplify the challenges of teaching and, thus, increase the likelihood that people will gravitate toward extreme, perhaps unrealistic, positions. In retrospect, it seems to me that this is what happened when my colleagues and I discussed how to teach a writing course for students interested in business careers.

As we become accustomed to the dissonances we hear in the stories of our predecessors in literacy instruction, we might begin to acknowledge and accept the tensions in our own practices not as contradictions that must be resolved but as opportunities for further inquiry, inventiveness, action, risk-taking, and revision. In making visible for our fellow teachers and for the wider public our own energetic negotiations among competing languages, we might begin to move beyond the acrimony that sometimes creeps into our discussions with colleagues and begin to defuse the unproductive volatility that surrounds public debates about issues like ebonics, English Only classrooms, mainstreaming, and national standards. Even more importantly, we might begin to serve as productive models for our students, who inevitably find themselves similarly negotiating among various languages both inside our classrooms and in the wider worlds beyond the schoolyard.

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Jane Greer is assistant professor of English at the University of Missouri and director of the Greater Kansas City Writing Project.

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Assessing Computers for Writing: Stepping Back to Move Forward

BY STEPHEN MARCUS

In our professional lives, we are often looking for simple answers to complex questions. Particularly in areas of relatively new research, such as the potential of technology for improved literacy instruction, it can be difficult to arrive at definitive conclusions. For instance, all of us want to know:

"Do word processors improve writing skills?"

Research on improving writing with computers tends toward the same extremes as study in other areas concerned with the teaching of writing. At one extreme, the computer-related research is like crashing through an open door: "Our one-year, $75,000 study suggests that computers may have some affect on kids' writing." At another extreme, the focus of the research may be so narrow as to be virtually irrelevant to the actual teaching of writing— sort of like walking into a closed door: "Our keystroke-catcher analysis of the writing revision software protocol suggests that the backspace/spacebar ratio is inversely proportional to the physical dimensions of the disk on which the paper is stored, at the .05 level of statistical significance."

These fictional but factually-based examples may be extreme, but extreme studies on word processing that offer little or no practical insight for writing teachers are commonly found in the professional literature. This shouldn't be surprising, however, since theories and methods for studying the acquisition and use of writing skills are themselves still in the developmental stage. So when we add a complicated intervening variable, the computer, we have a particularly complex "event." It's little wonder that researchers have trouble carrying out studies that are rigorous, yet provide truly thought-provoking data.

"Ok, but does word processing improve writing skills?"

There is no shortage of anecdotal evidence. Such reports have, in fact, been a major factor in fueling the enthusiasm for computer use in writing. People work with word processors. They undergo minor to major transformations in their experience of themselves as writers. They report these changes to their friends, and they want to share them with their students. And so it goes.

Unfortunately (even if understandably), site administrators as well as those with district and state-level responsibilities, under pressure to make major capital expenditures for equipment and software, would like some harder evidence that the reportedly magical properties of the technology are not mere illusions or the products of good intentions or wishful thinking. Fortunately, regular readers of professional publications will find ample support for their experience and intuition concerning the value of technology in relation to writing instruction. Numerous books devoted to this topic have been published by NCTE, Heinemann-Boynton/Cook, Intellect Press, Open University Press and others. These texts have provided an ongoing account of researchers' efforts to establish with some experimental rigor the efficacy and advantage of using technology to promote instruction. Of course, those who remain skeptical—and those whose unbridled enthusiasm needs tempering—can also find abundant cautionary notes, often in the same sources or in discussions like Jane Healy's *Endangered Minds* (Simon & Schuster, 1998), which suggests at one point a distinction between computer-mediated efforts and "real reading and writing."

In examining reports from both sides, however, readers need to remind themselves that sometimes the hidden criterion for what constitutes "hard data" is merely that it's "data that supports my point of view...that other stuff is anecdotal or procedurally flawed."

"So...does word processing improve writing skills?"

While at Stanford University's Institute for Communication Research, William Paisley and Milton Chen asked some very astute questions about efforts to study the technology ("Children and Electronic Text," NIE Study, 1982). In part, they wanted to know whether research questions were being asked at the time of the students' initial or later use of the technology and whether the technology itself was in its early or mature stage of development. We could add the question of whether the methods for *teaching* the technology are in their early or later stage of development.

The contributing authors to Paisley and Chen's later work (*Children and Microcomputers*, Sage 1985) provided important theoretical and research models, and the editors observed that "we are learning to describe and classify the relevant social phenomena," adding the cautionary note that "our thinking is not yet systematic or capable of deriving general principles...we need more experience."

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Studies over the intervening years addressing the question of whether word processing improves writing skills would appear to have received ample, varied, and in-depth examination. Appearances, however, can be deceiving, since it is often the case that "believing is seeing," that is, that one's preconceptions, biases, and agendas can significantly influence what one accepts as visible, even through a supposedly scientific lens (see, for example, R. Picard, *Affective Computing*, MIT Press, 1999).

In the study of word processing and writing, rigorous research is confounded by the rapid change in the technology itself and the vested interests people develop toward the use of one word processor or another. Discovering the true potential of computers is also hampered by the relative lack of development of instructional strategies for teaching word processing. For example, word processing instruction is often limited to teaching little more than "delete" and "save." Specialized search-and-replace procedures, as well as other advanced techniques that are potentially helpful in revision, are rarely taught. In fact, most teachers fall within the parameters of the 80/20 Rule for Technology, a rule of thumb that suggests that 80% of the people using a particular technology (hardware or software) make use of only 20% of its power or features. Since we can only teach what we know, and we only know what we use, and we only use a small subset of the tools word processors offer for writers, much of the potential of word processors for improving students' writing and revision remains unused, unknown and untaught.

And to further muddy the waters, word processing is no longer one context-independent skill: researchers must tease apart different word processing techniques and technologies used in different environments: word processing in general, word processing for the Web, for e-mail, for news groups, for MOOs, MUDs, and other virtual communities, and for hypertext environments created with applications like HyperStudio and HyperCard.

Steven Gilbert and Richard Green further complicate the question by adding another variable. They place the question in the context of a cost/benefit analysis. The question itself, they say, may be "more difficult and costly to measure than is warranted by the declining costs of providing the service" (*Change*, May/June 1986). To summarize their argument all too briefly, in situations where the technology is being used for a variety of purposes (e.g. basic computer literacy and software applications training, instruction in a variety of disciplines, laboratory and simulation courses, data analysis and other research related projects, journalism and other design and production projects, etc.), it's getting harder and harder to determine exactly what proportion of those costs should be attributed to word processing and writing instruction *per se*, and no matter how you apportion them, prorated costs are dropping rapidly. The authors' analyses of costs, benefits, and penalties (for poorly thought-out and implemented use of technology) are particularly relevant for anyone considering whether it is "worth it" to devote financial resources to using technology to improve writing.

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"Could you repeat the question?"
Word processing technology is still evolving and is still fairly primitive. Methods for teaching the technology, and questions about how and whether it should be incorporated into the language arts curriculum, are still matters of intense debate. For many, this question needs to be considered in the context of how and when. For example, there are vast and often vitriolic differences of opinion regarding how old children should be before they are introduced to computers. The distinctions between "teaching word processing" and "teaching writing using word processing" are regularly lost, or not even considered, in many computer courses. Controversies over the use of grammar, style, and spelling checkers continue to rage, often fueled by the particular (dis)abilities of the software available for such tasks.

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Focused attention on what we are doing and how we are doing it is an important stage in setting goals and planning change. However, if the past is of any use in predicting the future, we can be fairly sure that advances in the technology itself will continually outstrip our understanding of what to make of it, what to do with it—and how much to pay for it.

Research, even of the open- and closed-door varieties, often enriches the researcher more than the reader. For teachers with an interest in conducting their own classroom-based exploration — that is, those who want to "research" rather than just use the technology — there remain some rather straightforward goals: Ask not what word processors can do for your students; ask what your students can do with their word processors. Learn from your students and for yourself what the technology can and cannot do, how it is changing their habits and attitudes. This is one nice way of getting them to think about their own composing process: what it used to be, what it is, what it could be like.

"Does word processing improve writing skills?" I'm glad you asked. Ask your students. And see if they can prove it.

Oh ... You Meant Writing *Scores* Not *Skills*
There is an understandable penchant for demanding "hard data" to support one pedagogical approach or another, particularly when ideologies, significant expenditures, careers, reputations, and legacies are at stake. What is acceptable as "hard" data seems to depend as often as not on a mix of such volatile factors.

In the area of technology-involved writing instruction, there are those stakeholders—some parents, school board members, administrators, legislators—who look to standardized achievement test scores as the sole significant measure of effectiveness. Others—like *other* parents, instructional specialists, administrators, and community

7 Ways to Ensure a Computer Lab Doesn't Improve Writing Instruction

Here are some sure-fire methods—based on real-world examples—for getting less than you bargained for.

1. Have learning about the computer or the software itself become the focus of lab instruction—rather than using the lab to teach writing.

2. Make sure that teachers relinquish responsibility for what their students are learning in the lab.

3. Make it difficult for teachers to schedule the lab and for students to use it.

4. Make sure there aren't enough printers, so students have to wait...and wait...and wait...to get their work printed out.

5. Put the lab in the hands of someone who already has too much to do.

6. Don't train the teachers to use the lab.

7. Don't budget for staff development or software.

If you find too many of the "guidelines" noted above being followed at a site you're planning or scrutinizing, you might just remind everyone of writer Kurt Vonnegut's suggestion that "A step backward, when you're headed in the wrong directions, is a step forward." People shouldn't be afraid to change their minds and to change their direction.

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leaders—embrace a wider array of indicators as defining the scope and effectiveness of what characterizes effective writing instruction and a skillful and successful writer. They often look to increased attendance and time-on-task, reduced absenteeism, better attitudes toward teachers and school, increased willingness to engage in writing-related tasks (in and out of school), their own examination of students' portfolios, and other such factors as significant indicators of improved instruction.

Hard-data seekers of either type can log onto the Web site established for the City University of New York's recent Forum on "Student Learning and Technology: Assessing the Impact" (www.nettech.org/forum), where are posted many particularly apposite references and resources related to assessing the computer's impact on students' learning to write—and writing to learn. I've provided below a few that sample the array of hard data and hard looks at the field.

- "Writing is the one area where deep and sustained access to technology makes a difference. At the 7th, 8th, and 9th grade levels, Explore students do significantly better than their non-Explore peers on the writing portion of state tests." The Union City Story: Education Reform and Technology / Students' Performance on Standardized Tests (April 1998). Education Development Center (96 Morton Street, New York, NY 10014, 212-807-4200).

- "[L]arge scale assessments of writing, at state, national and even international levels, are attempting to estimate students' writing skills by having them use paper-and-pencil. Our results, if generalizable, suggest that for students accustomed to writing on computer for only a year or two, such estimates of student writing abilities based on responses written by hand may be substantial underestimates of their abilities to write when using a computer." "Testing Writing on Computers," M. Russell and W Haney. Education Policy Analysis Archives (Jan 15, 1997). College of Education, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287 <http://olam.ed.asu.edu/epaa >

Writing is the one area where deep and sustained access to technology makes a difference.

- "[T]his was one of the largest and deepest studies ever done on the effects of educational technology, and we have an exhaustive amount of data—quantitative, qualitative, and longitudinal—in addition to the anecdotal reports. Everything points to the same conclusion—that increased technology supports, facilitates, and encourages student achievement. The gains reach across schools and districts with different education policies and sociodemographic backgrounds." "Technology and Achievement," D. Mann and E. A. Shafer. *The American School Board Journal*, July 1997 (or Mohawk Regional Information Center, 313-361-5530).

- "Student writing [is] a key goal for technology integration." (Boulder Valley, CO). "The district adopted a strong focus on writing and using the technology as a tool to facilitate the writing process." (Scott County, KY). National Study Tour of District Technology Integration (December 1996). Education Development Center (96 Morton Street, New York, NY 10014, 212-807-4200).

- "Improvements in writing have been seen in [these and] other projects where computers are generally available at home and in school, and are usually associated with changes in teaching that accompany improved facility to revise and efforts to incorporate process writing approaches." Anytime Anywhere Learning Project; The Buddy Project. Rockman *ET AL*, 605 Market Street, #305, San Francisco, CA 94105 <www.rockman.com >

- "If computing costs are low enough, and if the benefits are easy enough to observe, then expensive, elaborate evaluations become unnecessary for fundamental campus decisions. By the same token, if the potential cost of a single application of the technology is so low, and the benefit of that application is so great, formal evaluation may be unnecessary.... As the cost of machines continues to decline, *word processing alone* (authors' emphasis) will soon justify computing capability for every student, faculty member, and most administrators." "New Computing," S. W. Gilbert and K.C. Green. *Change* (May/June 1986).

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An examination of any of the references above will suggest, as noted at the start of this discussion, that successful use of technology for teaching and learning writing depends on "multiple converging determinants." John Cradler (Educational Support Systems (cradler@earthlink.net) has provided a useful "Inventory of Conditions for Effective Technology Use," designed to assess the extent to which conditions are present that make possible the optimal use and impact of technology in teaching and learning from the classroom to the school district level. Noting that "the impact of technology [is] largely a function of factors other than the technology itself," Cradler has provided a handy tool for gaining perspectives on why certain projects (e.g., those cited above) seem to flourish more than others.

Here are the major categories of the Inventory:

- Local commitment to innovation and change.
- Characteristics of school governance and leadership.
- Curriculum and performance standards.
- Coordination and integration with other programs.
- Staff development and technical assistance.
- Technology utilization.
- Courseware and online resources.
- Access to technology.
- Administrative support
- Community involvement.
- Assessment and evaluation.

Word processing and attendant developments in telecommunication— including e-mail, the Internet, and the World Wide Web—by themselves have transformed composing process theory (e.g., prewriting, writing, getting feedback, editing, publishing) into a composing process environment, one that is accessible, practical, and for more and more students, affordable.

The assumption, based on the extant literature, is that such factors are significant components that "when taken together maximize the contributions technology can make to improving teaching and learning" of writing.

Word processing and attendant developments in telecommunication— including e-mail, the Internet, and the World Wide Web—by themselves have transformed composing process *theory* (e.g., prewriting, writing, getting feedback, editing, publishing) into a composing process *environment*, one that is accessible, practical, and for more and more students, affordable. The technology itself can fruitfully be considered both as figure and ground, as classroom denizen and ecosystem, perhaps as particle and wave. Assessing its impact—on both students and educators—promises to remain as interesting and challenging in the future as it has been in the past.

What do we know about the impact of technology on student writing? What happens when we try to integrate technology into teaching and learning?

This article is, admittedly and unavoidably, a deeply superficial discussion of some of the background, issues, and determinants that respond to—if not exactly answer—these core questions. Its intention is to suggest some directions and resources for exploration by full-time researchers and part-time teacher-researchers.

Stephen Marcus, Ph.D., is co-director of the South Coast Writing Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He coordinates the National Writing Project Technology Network.

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Books

Mina P. Shaughnessey: Her Life and Work

BY JANE MAHER
Urbana: NCTE 1997. $25.95; 331 pages

REVIEWED BY MELANIE HAMMER

The group of college students variously labeled remedial or developmental or underprepared has come under fire from many directions lately, as have the programs that serve this population. Politicians, conservative think tanks, researchers who wander onto campuses, and traditional professors uncomfortable with a student body that they find unfamiliar complain about the presence of underprepared students in college. They have been blamed for wasting resources, for pulling down standards, for not wanting to learn. Even some more sympathetic critics say that certain students are just not equipped to take advantage of what college has to offer, the implication being that they would be much happier somewhere else, somewhere out of school.

Twenty years ago, Mina P. Shaughnessy was one of the pioneers in making a place for nontraditional students on a college campus. She taught developmental writers at New York's City College for a decade beginning in 1967 and wrote one book based on her work. Despite her relatively brief career, that book, *Errors and Expectations*, remains a must-read for any teacher working with a student population labeled "underprepared." In a recent biography, *Mina P. Shaughnessy: Her Life and Work*, Jane Maher, a professor of developmental writing at Nassau Community College, has produced a detailed and absorbing portrait. Through numerous extensive interviews with Shaughnessy's family and colleagues, as well as perusal of Shaughnessy's papers, Maher has traced the development of Shaughnessy as a person and a teacher.

Born in South Dakota in 1924, Mina Pendo Shaughnessy went to Northwestern University to major in speech, with a career in drama in mind. "Teaching" was listed third on her list of career possibilities. Once in New York, however, she drifted away from theater, though Maher suggests that the speech background served her well later, during her years at City College, when Shaughnessy was often in a position of having to defend her students and her work to hostile or uncomprehending listeners. Shaughnessy worked a series of jobs and eventually enrolled in the English Ph.D. program at Columbia University. Shortly after she was married, however, her financial situation caused her to leave the program and begin work at McGraw-Hill Publishers.

Shaughnessy's career as a teacher began in 1961, when she began to work part-time in the General Studies program at Hunter College, a component of the City University system in New York. Maher suggests that those first years teaching at Hunter functioned almost as a kind of "dress rehearsal" for what Shaughnessy would face later at City College. Students in the General Studies program frequently were those who fell outside the guidelines of Hunter's regular admissions standards, and were considered "deficient" or "remedial" by many professors at the college. As Shaughnessy began to consider both the kinds of mistakes her students made as well as what she would later call "the intelligence of the error," she also encountered the split between those professors who welcomed underprepared students those who thought they didn't belong at a four-year college.

Although she hoped for a full-time job at Hunter, it was Hofstra University on Long Island that eventually gave Shaughnessy her first full-time teaching job in 1964. She continued to keep working at Hunter at night, hoping eventually to get a full-time job there, but eventually realized that without a Ph.D., she couldn't get one. In 1967, however, she was offered a full-time position at City College, to teach in and administer the English component of a new program, the "PreBaccalaureate Program," later renamed SEEK. It was designed to attract and support students from minority groups, particularly Black and Latino, that had previously been underrepresented at the college. For that program, her experience teaching nontraditional students at Hunter was considered more valuable than a Ph.D.

Mina P. Shaughnessey: Her Life and Work

Shaughnessy entered her job at City College during an era of political upheaval, and SEEK had to face protests by disgruntled faculty who believed that admitting SEEK students undermined the college, and, in some extreme cases, the country. Some of these professors made her a personal target. According to Maher, Shaughnessy believed that direct confrontation was not the most effective response to the criticism; instead, she developed a method for surviving and thriving under difficult conditions, one which she later passed on as advice to others seeking to set up a program in basic writing. "First of all," Shaughnessy advised,

> *be prepared to work harder than you've ever worked before. Next, develop a camaraderie among all the people assigned to teach basic writing: let them get to know each other, enjoy each other's company, and learn from each other. Make sure there are enough meetings and discussions for this to take place. In addition, try to recruit people from the senior faculty because that is where some of the best teachers are often found, and they will become the most effective teacher in the program not simply because of their experience but because of the knowledge and influence they have on campus. But most important, she said, make it look like you're having fun.* (p. 96)

When Shaughnessy began her work at City, about two-thirds of the college's English department taught literature, while one-third taught writing. By 1969, this ratio was exactly the reverse.

In 1972, Shaughnessy was awarded a Carnegie Foundation grant, and she began doing the work that developed into *Errors and Expectations*. Maher reports how Shaughnessy read and categorized the errors in 4000 student essays, and she cites an impressive list from some of the "scores of books and articles in the field of linguistics, composition sociology and psychology" that informed Shaughnessy's work. Shaughnessy continued to work on the book over the next few years, through personal crises that included her mother's illness and death. After she was made a dean at CUNY, she continued to tutor students at Hunter in writing, so she could keep her skills as a teacher sharp. Finally, in January, 1977, *Errors and Expectations* was published. It received a quick and positive response, with reviewers citing both the scholarship and the spirit of the book in publications from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to the New York *Times*. *Errors and Expectations* sold more than 12,000 hardcover copies in the six months after publication, and later sold more than 40,000 copies of the paperback education. Unfortunately, Shaughnessy also began to experience serious health problems about the time the book was published. Despite her ailments, later diagnosed as cancer, she continued to attend conferences and to speak.

It is in the seventh chapter of the book, entitled "A Grand Experiment," where Maher has most effectively concentrated excerpts from a number of Shaughnessy's speeches and letters from that time, that make clear that Shaughnessy understood the political implications of her work. At the end of one speech, Shaughnessy says,

> *To prepare only some people to flourish in a democracy and then to argue that they are the only people with the native ability to do so is to consent to the existence, within the boundaries of what we call public education, of the most exclusive country club of all.* (p. 205)

Shaughnessy's work was in response to that country club, in resistance to that elitism, and that understanding fuels the work that many developmental educators do today, twenty years after she made her speech.

Mina Shaughnessy died in November, 1978, but she lived to see some of the impact of her work. *Errors and Expectations* remains an important book in the field, one that continues to be read by classroom teachers, not just cited by researchers. In her biography of Shaughnessy, Jane Maher has written a good companion piece to Shaughnessy's work. The woman who in some ways was the mother of all developmental educators emerges in Maher's book as a three-dimensional person, with time for friends, clothes and the New York Yankees, as well as a teacher completely dedicated both intellectually and morally to her work. Considering the current hostility towards developmental students both inside and outside the academy, Maher's book is a useful reminder of how far we have come, and how far we still have to go.

Melanie Hammer is the co-director of the Long Island Writing Project She teaches in the Basic Education Department at Nassau Community College, Garden City, New York.

Today You Are My Favorite Poet

BY GEOF HEWITT
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. $17.00; 129 pages

INTERVIEW BY PATRICIA MCGONEGAL

Geof Hewitt, co-director of the National Writing Project in Vermont, has been teaching poetry writing to teenagers and publishing their work for 29 years. Geof, himself a poet with publication credits ranging from Harpers to Exquisite Corpse and performance venues as diverse as the Whitney Museum and the Honolulu Zoo, has collected his ideas about ways to help kids write poems in a new book, Today You Are My Favorite Poet: Writing Poems With Teenagers *(Heinemann, 1998). Below, NWPV director Patricia McGonegal interviews Geof about his book and his teaching.*

Tish McGonegal: Geof, in several places in this book, you either quote or make up a definition of poetry; there's Sandburg's on your first page, and at least two of your own. Is this a deliberate measure, meant to keep us unsure of what poetry is?

Geof Hewitt: My intention is to foster an expanded view of "poetry." If we are willing to allow the author to determine which of his/her writing is "poetry," that person may be more willing to write it than if we impose restrictive definitions.

TM: Tell me about Claire Feldman, whose chapbook of poems runs through your book.

GH: A dedicated poet, now a college sophomore, Claire wrote a series of poems as a high-school student in my poetry workshop at Vermont's Governor's Institute on the Arts, and later in an independent senior study with me. After she'd published the poems in a chapbook, I asked her to write a comment on each poem with the now-fulfilled aim of printing the poems and commentaries as openers for each chapter. Claire is remarkably professional in her approach, and I believe she will continue to write poems throughout her life.

TM: What is a chapbook, anyway? Is it like a portfolio of poetry?

GH: A "chapbook" is a small book of poems, songs, or essays. There may be some further, traditional limitations to the definition — such as "not exceeding 32 pages," but I'm not sure of such specifics.

TM: I like your emphasis on spoken, dramatized poetry, especially devices like reading one's poem twice, in a different way each time. How do you get past the disabling shyness of some young people?

GH: I don't force it and usually the shyness gives way to the very human desire to communicate. Some writers want their work only on the page, and I respect that. But if it's a classroom where I'm trying to foster speaking skills, I'll speak privately with any reluctant student, and learn what accommodations will make it possible for him/her to read a poem aloud.

TM: I sense a juxtaposition in what you are suggesting teachers do at different levels; high school teachers might loosen up and write a few of Dennis Murphy's Doodah poems, "a work of art in which two things with no apparent connection are featured" (p. 9), while teachers of elementary kids should let them "explore poetry as a tool for serious exploration and communication." What about teachers who feel threatened about invasion of curricular turf?

GH: Reading and writing poetry enlivens curriculum. Any curriculum! For instance, do we attend to the arts of a given culture or historical period in our social studies/history classes? Do we give consideration to the relationship of the arts to science and mathematics? Any teacher who brings poetry into his/her curriculum is wisely casting a fatter net than ever for the interest of students who might otherwise reject the content of the course.

TM: Do you expect this book to help Vermont toward inclusion of poetry in a portfolio? How?

GH: Not really. The book will more likely reaffirm what many teachers already know and provide a useful guide to those teachers who want to include poetry writing in their

Today You Are My Favorite Poet

curriculum, but have always felt intimidated by the form.

TM: Another exercise that tickled me: the reworking of a piece as a telegram:

> *Write a letter from the point of view of someone who is far away…*
>
> *Rewrite the letter as a telegram where every word costs one dollar to send. What are the most important details?*
>
> *Go back to the letter and the telegram and look for phrases that would work as the basis for an entire poem.* (p. 15)

Have you written any telegrammatic poems yourself?

GH: Yes. Haiku among them. Lots of wiseguy stuff, as well as serious haiku, e.g., "Between Hemingway/And Homer you'll find my books/At better bookstores" and "Ancient icicle!/You've been so hard all winter./Now sun brings your tears."

TM: I love the tales you tell on yourself: you seem willing enough to report your dead-end lessons and other limitations. It reminds me of Ken Macrorie's advice: a case study of what doesn't work is much more interesting than a success story. Do you have other confessions?

GH: Old dogs should continue to teach themselves new tricks, and (ideally) also develop some limited acceptance of their own personality traits. Recently I visited a former student of mine, on the campus where he is now studying to become a music teacher. He told me that in his practice teaching, he finds himself using the same phrases of exasperation that his teachers used. "Oh no!" he commented. "I'm turning into my old teachers!" I'm sending him an essay I wrote two or three years ago when I (finally) realized the same propensity in myself. He's only twenty! So he's a good thirty years ahead of me.

TM: I learn from a phrase like "Suggesting a form often helps a writer find words." Teaching is such a judgment call between form and freedom. How do you find a workable ratio when you are teaching about poetry?

GH: I just keep "mixing it up" from session to session, hoping to hit on ideas that work, at one time or another, for each student.

TM: You create a powerful metaphor to define form: "Form: another tumbler in the lock that may need a turn." You model the use of metaphor so well. Again, a sense of balance seems necessary. But there is such a thing as metaphor overkill, agree?

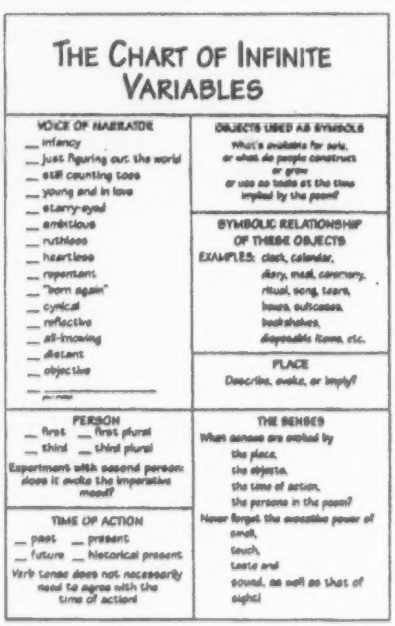
GH: Yes! Poems written for the sake of metaphor are suspect, but when metaphor organically appears, voilá! It's the difference between what seems spontaneous, necessary and that which seems fabricated. But all writers benefit from being reminded of metaphor as a tool, and sometimes poets have great success presenting one half of the metaphor as the poem's title, then extending the other half as the poem's body.

TM: In your "imitation vs. influence" section, you say, "It is almost impossible for a young writer not to be influenced in some way by the work of a favorite author." I was reminded of a demonstration by one of our teacher consultants, Peggy Sadler, called "Creating a Personal Anthology." Peggy suggests students find poetry that speaks to who they are. Would you suggest this kind of collection?

GH: Sounds like a good idea. So is a collection or chapbook of tall tales or poems about baseball or animals or love. Some students respond to a reader's recognition of themes in their work. A teacher might well inspire a student by saying, "Why don't you put together a chapbook of your poems on this subject?" Chapbooks make great gifts!

TM: What are your thoughts on memorizing poetry? Have you ever assigned this type of thing? Do you do much yourself?

GH: No. But when I reread a favorite poem it sometimes "sticks," and I'm glad to have it pasted somewhere inside my brain for spontaneous enjoyment when I'm driving or at a loss for something to say at a meeting.



THE CHART OF INFINITE VARIABLES

VOICE OF NARRATOR
__ infancy
__ just figuring out the world
__ still counting toes
__ young and in love
__ starry-eyed
__ ambitious
__ ruthless
__ heartless
__ repentant
__ "born again"
__ cynical
__ reflective
__ all-knowing
__ distant
__ objective
__ _____

OBJECTS USED AS SYMBOLS
What's available for sale, or what do people construct or grow or use as tools at the time implied by the poem?

SYMBOLIC RELATIONSHIP OF THESE OBJECTS
EXAMPLES: clock, calendar, diary, mask, ceremony, ritual, song, tears, bows, suitcases, bookshelves, disposable items, etc.

PLACE
Describe, evoke, or imply?

PERSON
__ first __ first plural
__ third __ third plural
Experiment with second person: does it evoke the imperative mood?

TIME OF ACTION
__ past __ present
__ future __ historical present
Verb tense does not necessarily need to agree with the time of action!

THE SENSES
What senses are evoked by the place, the objects, the time of action, the persons in the poem?
Never forget the evocative power of smell, touch, taste and sound, as well as that of sight!

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Today You Are My Favorite Poet

TM: At one point you suggest cataloging "parts of speech" [underlining nouns, circle verbs...]. Is this a nod toward the "back to basics" people, or does it have inherent value on its own?

GH: Inherent value. Writers need to know the parts of speech and to analyze their work with a keen awareness of its nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. Parts of speech revision is only one of several useful focusing tools that help in revising poetry (and prose!).

TM: Likewise the chart of infinite variables (see previous page) makes me uncomfortable. Can't you see that turning into a unit plan in the "wrong hands"? Maybe it should have a disclaimer attached to it: "Kids, don't try to create this chart at home!"

GH: Anything useful can get into "the wrong hands" or be abused. The idea wheel (see below) merely makes visible a variety of random approaches to finding a topic. Can't you see that turning into a unit plan in the "wrong hands"? The only "wrong hands" approach to the idea wheel I can imagine would be to force the student to write in response to what the wheel suggests. Of course, for some of us, a little forcing has occasionally brought great success, but I'm not a great fan of forcing.

TM: In your chapter on assessing and responding to student poetry, you are critical of the response "This makes me sad," which you call an evaluation from "yesterday's classrooms." It sounds more like reader response to me, the kind of thing Peter Elbow uses with his students. Isn't that another device that would [as Graves likes to say] "keep the students writing?"

GH: Sure. Graves also talks about "nudging" the student with open-ended questions that help the student set new goals. Subjective response or judgment ("This makes me sad," "Good work!") doesn't give the writer much direction.

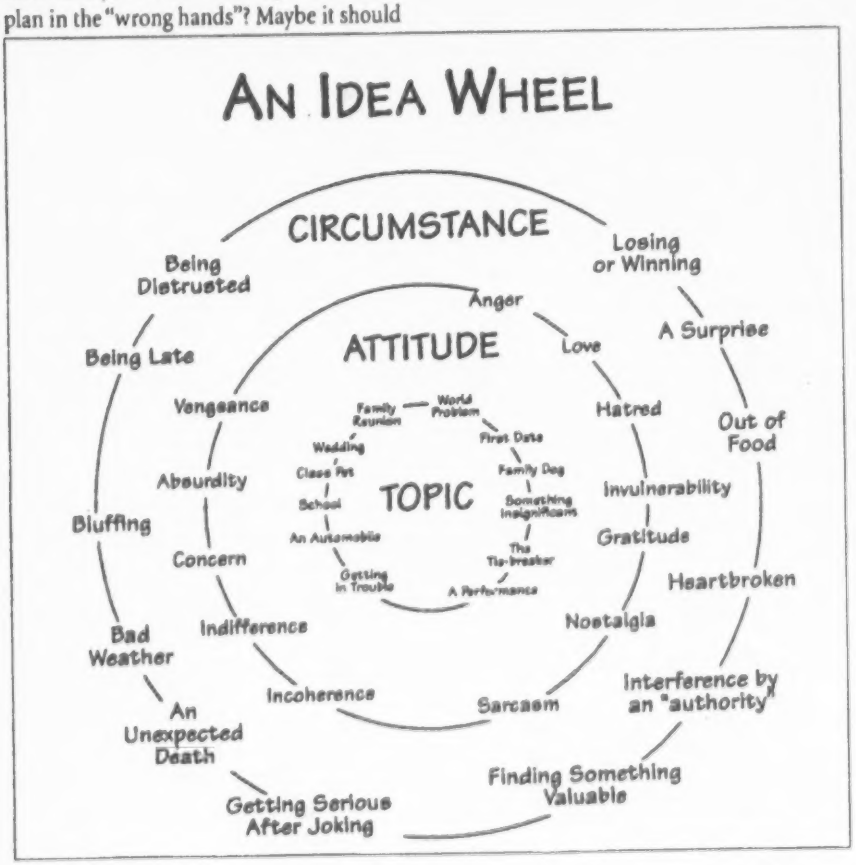
TM: Geof, what is one thing you would like teachers to take with them from reading this?

GH: The notion of themselves as poets or, at least, as people who are willing, from time to time, to "fish for a poem" as they write. I expect ninety-five percent of what I write to be worthless; the five percent that I eventually fall in love with wouldn't be written if I didn't allow myself to be a terrible writer most of the time.

TM: Here's your chance to have the last word: is there anything else you'd like to say about this book?

GH: Writing poems is my favorite and most restorative activity. It doesn't matter so much whether a poem is "art" as it matters whether a poem is being written. It's a powerful little act, writing poems, and we should let our students know about it!

Tish McGonegal is director of the National Writing Project in Vermont.



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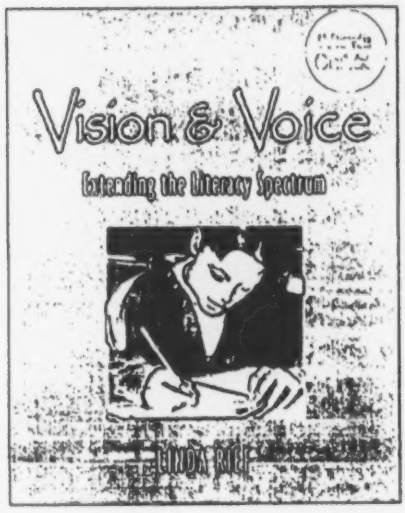
Vision & Voice:
Extending the Literacy Spectrum

BY LINDA RIEF
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. $19.00; 160 pages

REVIEWED BY NANCY D. KERSELL



At the heart of any language arts curriculum, teachers focus on classroom practices, integrating material and writing strategies from a variety of disciplines. With engaging enthusiasm, Linda Rief invites us to join her in "extending our notions of the literacy spectrum to include the visual and oral arts in the reading and writing classroom" (ix). This short text provides a number of writing-to-learn exercises which encourage students to express themselves using artistic forms ranging from song lyrics to cartoons. Although her activities are designed for middle school students, the ideas, techniques, and outcomes she proposes can be adapted easily for any grade level.

Rief describes two comprehensive projects that illustrate how to integrate interdisciplinary material in the writing classroom: a lengthy environmental study of the rain forest and a unit on textile mills of the Industrial Revolution. The rain forest project involved students in research and creative activities culminating in all sorts of products, including bookmarks, pamphlets, picture books, posters, curriculum guides for younger students, and a full-scale, three-dimensional rain forest model. She provides numerous samples of student work depicting their research methods as well as their final creative pieces.

Using different but equally versatile strategies, Rief focuses on music, a field trip, and historical fiction to immerse her students in the atmosphere of nineteenth-century textile mills. After they had explored the economic and cultural significance of the textile industry, her students composed poems and converted them into song lyrics, created a story theater, and combined all these elements into a musical production about work in the mills.

Since many teachers lack the resources or time to assign such impressive but complex projects, Rief also includes a chapter of "practical vignettes," called "Picturing Possibilities," containing short exercises for inspiring creativity based on student journal entries. Many of the samples include cartoons on current events and historical topics, sketches or doodles, and poetry painted on the school building walls.

Without plunging into theory, Rief's list of outcomes clearly demonstrates how practicing other art forms can help students discover multiple ways of knowing in the "language-rich" classroom. In particular, she stresses the value of exposing students to interdisciplinary study, reinforcing different learning styles, encouraging a spirit of inquiry, and developing research skills—certainly not original concepts, but crucial to the enrichment of our students' lives.

This guidebook contains a tantalizing and extensive series of appendices with samples of teacher handouts and student work. Rief also provides extensive lists of references following each chapter. A multimedia CD supplementing the book features more detailed photographs and commentary about the two primary projects at each stage of their development.

Although *Vision & Voice* doesn't offer many innovative techniques, it does supply educators wanting to awaken their students' artistic sensibilities with an impressive catalog of resources, teaching ideas, and concrete advice for giving students a wider spectrum of learning opportunities. As in her earlier books, Linda Rief also imparts a love of teaching which is contagious and inspirational. All these attributes contained in *Vision & Voice* make it a useful guidebook for reawakening our imaginations to the power of artistic expression in all its forms and sharing this appreciation with our students.

Nancy Kersell is director of the Northern Kentucky Writing Project.

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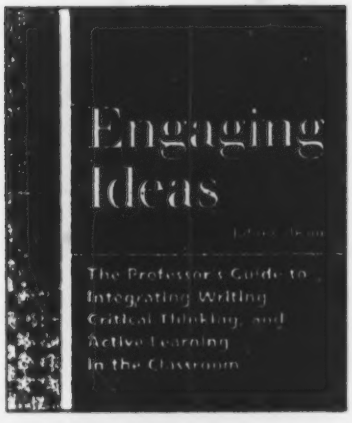
Engaging Ideas

JOHN C. BEAN
San Francisco, Jossey Bass: 1996. $34.95; 304 pages

REVIEWED BY MARY BETH CULP



John Bean's book is aptly named. The ideas in it are engaging; they engage the audience, the college professor, in thinking and rethinking the ways in which writing can be used to stimulate thinking and learning in any discipline. But the term *engaging* has a double meaning. Not only do the ideas and strategies in the book engage the teacher, but they help the teacher engage the student with concepts, principles, questions, and problems of the discipline under study. In the preface, Bean states a basic premise of the book—that critical thinking and all significant learning originate in the learner's engagement with problems.

Bean's style is clear, to the point, and jargon-free. He explains theories of learning and writing with such lucidity that readers see clearly the implications for teaching. Bean notes that

> *once writing is imagined as 'packaging,' students find little use for it. Separated from the act of thinking and creating, writing becomes merely a skill that can be learned through grammar drills and through the production of pointless essays that students do not want to write and that teachers do not want to read. This is the view of writing possessed by many first-year students when they show up at our gates to begin their college careers. It is the challenge of faculty across the disciplines to show them other ways of imagining writing.* (p.16)

Bean suggests that teachers plan their courses with critical thinking objectives in mind and then design critical thinking tasks for students to address with a repertoire of strategies: problems presented as formal writing assignments, as thought provokers for exploratory writing, as tasks for small group problem solving, and as practice for exams, among others. He gives examples from various disciplines to illustrate how slight variations in assignments can influence the thinking and writing processes of students. Bean asks us to consider the difference between a traditional "term paper" on Charles Darwin and a research paper on Darwin that begins with the presentation of a problem or question that the writer will investigate and try to resolve. The first assignment leads to an encyclopedic, or "all about" paper, while the second, which grows out of the writer's interest and demands critical thinking, leads to lively and successful writing.

The author makes a compelling case for valuing both professional and personal, or exploratory, writing in the classroom. He says that the two kinds of writing are not mutually exclusive, that personal writing enriches professional writing, and that we engage more students in our courses when we include several kinds of assignments. He describes various types of in-class writing, such as writing during a class to ask questions or express confusion; journal writing, including open-ended and guided journals; and creativity exercises, such as imaginary dialogues and metaphor games.

Bean also suggests ways of using writing to promote active reading and ways of using small groups to coach critical thinking. He suggests many strategies to help students interact with text: focused reading notes, reading logs, summary response notebooks, and imagined interviews with the author. He suggests that small groups can also be used to help students brainstorm ideas for an upcoming assignment, to discover arguments, or to critique rough drafts.

In the section on evaluating writing, Bean suggests several strategies for easing the paper load. His own personal strategy is not to read drafts but to permit rewrites. This method allows him to comment on papers as if they were drafts and yet assign a grade as if they were finished products. He says that the quality of the writing he initially receives is higher, since most students want to avoid a rewrite, and for some students the desire to improve their grades motivates them to take revision more seriously.

I have used this book quite successfully in a writing across the curriculum seminar for university faculty and in our summer institute with teachers of all levels. Bean is measured, reasoned, and tolerant of many points of view, and his ideas engage teachers and students in writing.

Mary Beth Culp is director of the Mobile Bay Writing Project.

Oregon TC Wins This Year's Hechinger Award

by Asali Solomon

Since 1996, the NWP and the Center for the Study of Writing (CSW) have recognized outstanding teachers who successfully translate writing research into classroom practice with the Fred Hechinger Award, established to honor Hechinger, who, at the time of his death, was Chairman of the CSW National Advisory Board. The most recent winner is Linda Christensen, a 20-year teacher of English and creative writing at Jefferson High School, an urban arts magnet school in Portland, Oregon.

In a letter in which he nominated Christensen for the Hechinger, Nathaniel Teich, Director of the Oregon Writing Project at the University of Oregon, commended Christensen for "questioning established assumptions and practices while advocating a responsible agenda for change."

Christensen has been involved with the Oregon Writing Project since 1980, and directed the project's institute for eight years. In the past year she has begun to develop curriculum with her district.

As a writer and a teacher of writing committed to reform, Christensen has shared her own poetry, encouraging student writers to also share their work in Jefferson's award-winning literary magazine. Beyond her own classroom, Christensen writes and edits for *Rethinking Schools: A Journal of Urban Education*, and has published articles in *English Journal* addressing issues of culture, language assessment and applications for imaginative writing in the classroom.

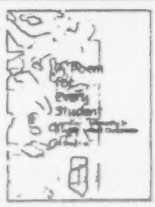
For the Hechinger Award committee, Christensen's work demonstrates a "clear connection between the research on multilingual, multicultural classrooms and the creative teaching practices she [has] developed."

These NWP books below are available for purchase. Call 510-642-0963 to order!

The Writer's Workout Book
113 Stretches Toward Better Prose
BY ART PETERSON
An accomplished teacher of writing shares 113 mini-lessons that have pushed his students to powerful prose. Includes 40 brief and lively essays about his writing classroom experience.

"These lessons will lead students to think like writers... Young writers as well as their teachers will gain increased respect for the power of words and a greater relish for the joy of playing with language... The essays and lessons in The Writer's Workout Book are laced with a whimsy and an irony that make it a constant joy to read." — Jim Gray, Founder, former Executive Director, NWP

Published by NWP / 1996 / Paperbound / 256 pages / ($13.00/$10.40 for Associates) / ISBN 1-883920-11-6



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BY SHERYL LAIN
This insider's portrait of the teaching life directs readers toward a humane, practical vision of school reform, one classroom, one teacher, one student at a time.

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Published by NWP / 1998 / Paperbound / 224 pages / ($11.00/$8.80 for Associates) / ISBN 1-883920-13-2

Teachers' Voices
Portfolios in the Classroom
BY MARY ANN SMITH & MIRIAM YLVISAKER, EDITORS
This is a ground-breaking work on portfolios that moves beyond theory as 13 teachers — at different grade levels and from different disciplines — tell their portfolio stories. These accounts of struggle and discovery have helped thousands of teachers take giant steps toward fairer and more meaningful assessment.

Published by NWP / 1993 / Paperbound / 184 pages / ($12.50/$10.00 for Associates) / ISBN: 1-883920-07-8

I Can Write What's on My Mind
Theresa Finds Her Voice
BY SHERRY SEALE SWAIN
Sherry Seale Swain's classroom journal immerses readers in the day-to-day life of this outstanding first grade teacher's classroom where youngsters work together to transform themselves into readers and writers. *I Can Write What's on My Mind* allows us to learn by watching a great teacher at work.

Published by NWP / 1994 / Paperbound / 112 pages / ($10.50/$8.40 for Associates) / ISBN 1-883920-09-4

Cityscapes
Eight Views from the Urban Classroom
NWP URBAN SITES NETWORK
Eight talented teachers take a close look at their work in city schools. The result provides an honest, inspiring and practical guide for those dedicated to making urban classrooms work. "Cityscapes gives us what we have desperately needed for a long time — cogently written essays by urban teachers detailing how insightful teaching produces excellent achievement for those students school systems have frequently failed." — Lisa D. Delpit, Professor, Educational Policy Studies, Georgia State University

Published by NWP / 1996 / Paperbound / 167 pages / ($12.50/$10.00 for Associates) / ISBN 1-883920-10-08

Writing Your Heritage
A Sequence of Thinking, Reading, & Writing Assignments
BY DEBORAH DIXON
College teacher Deborah Dixon takes readers on the journey she travels with her students as they discover more about themselves by exploring and writing about their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Teachers at all grade levels will be able to adapt the ideas in this book to help writers connect with their cultures.

Published by NWP / 1993 / Paperbound / 88 pages / ($8.00/$6.40 for Associates) / ISBN: 1-833920-08-6

Call for Manuscripts

We welcome lively, well-written articles on the writing process and on teaching writing, as well as articles on research in the teaching of it. The articles can take the form of personal experience or opinion, or can explore the work of others who have contributed to the field.

We are especially interested in articles by classroom teachers. If you have an idea you would like to develop, send a query letter or give us a call at 510-642-0976. Send ideas, drafts, and completed manuscripts to: The NWP Quarterly, *Graduate School of Education, 615 University Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.*

— The Editors

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National Writing Project DIRECTOR: Richard Sterling. CO-DIRECTORS: Mary Ann Smith and Elyse Eidman-Aadahl.

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The Only New Thing Under the Sun: 25 Years of the National Writing Project

BY SHERIDAN BLAU

Last May the California Writing Project met in Sacramento, CA, to celebrate its 25th anniversary. The keynote speaker on that occasion was Sheridan Blau, director of California's South Coast Writing Project and former President of the National Council of Teachers of English. Sheridan has been immersed in the writing project since its beginning, so he was the ideal choice to reiterate for those assembled the writing project's basic principles. For readers less familiar with what the NWP stands for, this piece, which serves as a tribute to writing project founder Jim Gray, should prove a valuable introduction. A version of Blau's speech will appear in a book Gray is writing on the history of the writing project, to be published by NWP in the year 2000.

The Only New Thing Under the Sun

"...there is no new thing under the sun," says Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes. And then he asks, "Is there any new thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new?" His answer: "It hath been already of old time." (Eccl. I, 9-10).

The wisdom of Ecclesiastes has been tested by 25 or 30 centuries of human experience and found to be largely true for every generation. But in our time what may seem to be the truest of its maxims has been challenged by our own experience as members of the California Writing Project community. For there does seem to be one new thing under the sun and that new thing is the writing project. And what is fundamentally new about it, new in the history of education and in the history of efforts to improve classroom teaching, is the essential model of professional development that was envisioned by James Gray in its founding at UC Berkeley in 1974. Jim's vision, his radically new insight and the foundational principle of the Bay Area, California and National Writing Projects, was the idea that the answers to the most serious academic problems that beset schools and classrooms can be found in the expertise of experienced classroom teachers themselves. What experienced classroom teachers know, he insisted, is all the curriculum one needs for an effective professional development program.

It was a new and shocking idea and it has not yet been fully understood in most precincts of the academic community. It is an idea that runs so much against the grain of conventional thinking about schools and teachers that many newer sites of the National Writing Project struggle for years to get it right. And when applications for federal funding through a National Writing Project grant are unsuccessful, more often than not they are unsuccessful because they fail to demonstrate an understanding of this first principle of the National Writing Project model.

Let me try to state the principle more fully and accurately: it is that the most reliable and credible solutions to the problems of learning and teaching that face classroom teachers and their students are to be found in the reservoir of wisdom and practical knowledge that is constituted by the collective knowledge in the possession of experienced and successful classroom teachers themselves. Thus the writing project looks to experienced and successful classroom teachers as the best resource available to the educational community for solving the academic problems that trouble us. Teachers are, in other words, not seen as a source of the problem but as the principal resource for the solution.

What Follows from Recognizing the Expertise of Teachers

A number of corollary principles follow from this first principle of the writing project, and they yield the familiar litany of guidelines and principles for a National Writing Project site. These include:

- the axiom that the best teacher of teachers is another teacher
- the requirement that sites foster and honor teacher leadership, and
- the custom of investing site leadership in a team that typically includes a university faculty member and a K-12 classroom teacher as co-directors.

Our first principle also leads logically and logistically to a few closely related principles and practices that have become cultural markers and even funding requirements of writing project sites and that also enrich and secure the authority of classroom teachers. First, there is the principle that while experienced classroom teachers are repositories of authoritative professional knowledge on what works in classrooms, they are also, as exemplary teachers, members of a profession and

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model learners for their students and for each other. As model learners, writing project teachers commit themselves in Summer Institutes first to function as writers, producing and responding to each other's work in progress and taking some pieces from incubation to publication. In this context, teachers examine the writing process and the perils and challenges of writing from the inside, with themselves as experimental subjects, interrogating in the experiment their own assumptions about writing and learning to write, and exploring the most useful ways to respond to writing.

The writing project looks to experienced and successful classroom teachers as the best resource available to the educational community for solving the academic problems that trouble us.

As model students and professionals, these teachers will also be inclined to reflect on, challenge, and enhance whatever they claim as their professional knowledge. What this means in practice is that writing project Fellows are expected to talk about and write about what they know and do in their teaching and (as a requirement for participation in a Summer Institute and beyond) conduct workshops or presentations for their colleagues, demonstrating some successful and principled approach to teaching composition or critical literacy. Through writing about their teaching and preparing for presentations that frame their practices within a rationale or theory, writing project teachers clarify and articulate their instructional goals both to themselves as well as to their colleagues. By creating teacher demonstrations of their best practice, teachers make their knowledge visible and open avenues for interrogation and critical reflection. And such questioning and self-examination — as every teacher of writing knows — inevitably lead to the refinement or revision of what is known.

It also follows that if writing project teachers are model learners and professionals who challenge and reflect on their knowledge and share it with colleagues through their writing and presentations, they will also challenge and reflect and seek to refine and validate their knowledge by examining it in the context of the discourse of the larger professional community, which means at least becoming familiar with the seminal body of theory and research in their field. This practice of including opportunities to read and discuss seminal works in the professional literature of the fields of composition and literacy studies is standard for writing project sites and a component of what the National Writing Project grant application reviewers refer to as the NWP model.

Many sites enrich their discussions of seminal readings and enlarge their participation in the discourse of the profession by inviting leading scholars and theoreticians to serve as guest consultants for a day or more in their Summer Institutes. The work of writers like Peter Elbow, Bonnie Sunstein, Miles Myers, and the late James Moffett may

Sheridan Blau, left, and Jim Gray celebrate CWP's 25th Anniversary.

be better known to classroom teachers through presentations at writing project sites than it is through published essays and books — better known, that is, in the sense of being more widely known, but perhaps also in the sense of being more deeply understood.

Problematic Issues and the Spirit of the WP Model

Not surprisingly, however, presentations by such eminent figures in our field — even by the same figures whose works we read during a Summer Institute — are not a feature of the writing project model, though they are not a violation either. Though guest lecturers appear at many mature and respected writing project sites (including my own), the practice remains a problematic one insofar as it threatens to obscure the intellectual authority and value of the expertise brought to a Summer Institute by the participating teachers themselves.

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Discussions of when and whether the use of guest consultants in a Summer Institute does or doesn't compromise the spirit of the writing project model sometimes take on the character of moral or ethical discourse and resemble the discourse of casuistry in the 17th century, or of ethical criticism or psychotherapy today, where discussion will focus on such questions as when fiscal prudence or frugality becomes the sin of avarice or when courage becomes recklessness, or when a healthy appetite and appreciation of food becomes gluttony or an eating disorder. We ask ourselves and each other, in other words, when the use of guest scholars in the case of a particular Summer Institute, might lead to the obscuration or marginalization of the expertise of participating teachers and when, on the other hand, it serves to enhance and publicly authorize the expertise of those same teachers.

Such discussions around problematic activities sponsored by writing project sites frequently show us how the model envisioned by Jim Gray is as much a spiritual or intellectual model as it is a set of particular practices. In fact, many of the most heated debates I have participated in, witnessed and heard about in reviews of writing project site funding applications are debates over whether and to what extent particular practices or their absence signify that a site enacts or violates or fails to enact the spirit or principles of the writing project model — the model is recognized as most essentially a model of principles, one that is subject to change and development in practices, in the interest of more fully actualizing the spirit that informs the model.

But although what is essential to the writing project model is its spirit or principles rather than its practices, I hasten to add that like all spiritual disciplines the spirit or principles of the writing project model can be known only through its practices, and that the practices traditionally and conventionally associated with the writing project model are the most reliable guide to discovering and sustaining its spirit. Any new writing project director would therefore be well-advised to enact all of the practices that are specified in the model that we have inherited from Jim Gray and the Bay Area Writing Project, even if the spirit behind those practices is not understood. For it frequently requires obedient adherence over time to the practices that instantiate the writing project model before the directors and teacher-leaders of a writing project site discover for themselves the meaning and importance of those practices.

Beyond the Summer Institute: The Creation of Learning Communities

My account of what Jim Gray created will be misleading, however, if I seem to be describing a program that merely prescribes how to conduct a Summer Institute. On the contrary, the writing project that has grown from Jim's conception into some 161 sites nationwide includes Summer Institutes virtually everywhere, but also includes an extensive school-based inservice program through which writing project summer Fellows share their expertise with a wider community of colleagues, and a constellation of academic-year programs for veterans of Summer Institutes, which is known as the Continuation or Continuity Program.

The idea that teachers might be the principal contributors to the professional learning of their colleagues might have been a new and difficult one for the educational community to assimilate, but what the teachers of writing project sites have created for themselves, building on their own professionalism and expertise, has to have been a surprise even to our visionary founder. Could it be that Jim Gray — with all his faith in classroom teachers, and blessed as he was with colleagues in his home site like Miles Myers, and Mary K. Healy, and Mary Ann Smith, and Cap Lavin, and Rebekah Caplan, and Jane Juska, and Bob Tierney, and Ruby Bernstein — legendary names in our profession — could even Jim have imagined what would come out of the feature of the model that was labeled as the Continuity Program, a feature that most of us in the early years of the Project thought of merely as some additional follow-up meetings during the academic year to keep our Project teachers updated and well-informed — Saturday Workshops in BAWP and weekday "Renewal Meetings" at my own site at UC Santa Barbara, for example.

Who would have imagined that virtually all mature writing project sites throughout the country would typically discover that much of the most important work of a writing project takes place not in Summer Institutes but in the multitude of teacher-led and teacher-initiated programs that sites now list in their annual reports as activities constituting their Continuity Program. I'm talking about teacher-research groups, case-study groups, special interest groups, and a multitude of book clubs and writing groups. Such groups might have 5 or 50

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writing project Fellows as members and might meet quarterly or monthly or more often than that. Mary Ann Smith belongs to a BAWP writing group that has been meeting monthly for over twenty years. Bob Tierney, who has retired to the now famous (because he is there) distant outpost of Poker Bar, drives seven hours each way every month to keep attending that writing group.

At my site a group of 12 teachers known as the SCWriP Teachers Collaborative has functioned as a combined writing group, book club, teacher-research group, and support group, meeting monthly for 12 years, acting as the midwife to several published articles, numerous workshop and conference presentations, experimental approaches to solving refractory teaching problems, and one important and nationally influential book. One of its members moved to Illinois for a couple of years and continued attending meetings by phone. Some meetings, unfortunately, had to be conducted in the hospital room of a member whose final thoughts and deathbed journal entries were a tribute to the personal and professional importance of her group and the writing they had inspired and influenced.

Many writing project sites — most mature sites — also conduct advanced institutes in summers or during the school year for veterans of Invitational Summer Institutes. A dozen sites have conducted advanced institutes in literature. Many have conducted specialized institutes in writing across the curriculum, or working with struggling readers, or multicultural literature, or technology, or bilingual language arts teaching. Special interest groups at my site and at others have been responsible for organizing important initiatives and special projects which became big-budget programs under the sponsorship of the Project— including young writers camps, parent projects, tutoring programs, and programs designed to provide access to higher education for historically under-represented populations of students.

What the teachers of writing project sites have created for themselves, building on their own professionalism and expertise, has to have been a surprise even to our visionary founder.

What is most important about the Continuity Program — and this I think is what Jim Gray and Miles Myers and others in the founding group *did* anticipate — is that it made each writing project site the locus for an ongoing and active community of colleagues, engaged in their own continuing professional development — a community that functions, in other words, as a learning community and a realization of the kind of community of scholars that the university has historically aspired to become but in its modern bureaucratized form has rarely managed to sustain, except in richly endowed specialized institutes and think-tanks. That is to say, the writing project is a site for continuing professional collaboration and inquiry, where learning is nurtured and valued, and where knowledge is as much produced as consumed, without the distinction raised by hierarchies of power (such as those that separate administrators, teachers, students), without bureaucratic or economic structures of reward or advancement. Learning is nurtured, shared, and disseminated among colleagues for its own sake and for the satisfaction of those who learn and become thereby more effective practitioners of their profession.

Learning Communities and the Culture of Schools

The intellectual power, activity, and productivity unleashed in writing project Continuity Programs — programs offering no financial incentives or extrinsic rewards for teacher-participants — is, I believe, unprecedented in the history of education and resists easy explanation. One possible explanation is that exemplary teachers are by definition exemplary learners and are therefore eager to share and explore ideas with a hunger that cannot be satisfied in any five-week Summer Institute. Once teachers begin to taste the intellectual pleasures of working with colleagues in a genuine community of learners, they aren't willing to return to a professional life that lacks such satisfactions.

Schools, however, for a variety of cultural and sociological reasons, are notoriously anti-intellectual places and have traditionally possessed no institutionalized mechanisms for nurturing or sustaining communities of teachers who wish to explore pedagogical and substantive ideas. So writing project teachers have created structures for continuing such work beyond the summer and for all the days of their professional lives.

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In the meantime, writing projects and their Fellows appear to be changing the culture of schools to make schools themselves more hospitable contexts for groups of teachers who want to form communities of learners with their colleagues. In fact, it now seems evident that writing project sites have had a significant impact on the culture of schools in their service areas by introducing into the schools the same sorts of inquiry groups, case-study groups, and teacher-research groups that have operated so successfully at writing project sites outside the sponsorship of schools.

Just as importantly, the writing project and its Fellows are changing the culture of schools in a parallel way for students. Having experienced what it means to learn in a community of learners, teachers are inclined to count such learning as more authoritative and authentic than any other and to think of such learning as the proper aim of instruction. They therefore become determined to turn their own classrooms into learning communities that will function like a writing project, where respect for the intelligence of every learner is the starting place for all activity, and where all learners are expected and required to take responsibility for their own learning as well as for assisting others to learn — a community where learning entails the production of knowledge as well as its reception and where knowledge is always seen as provisional and subject to challenge and refinement.

If that description sounds like everybody's definition of a model classroom, it is surely not every student's experience of classroom learning. Few of us have had any sustained experience of learning in such a community during our years as students in classrooms, and all of us know something of how difficult it must be to translate such an ideal for a classroom into the classrooms we actually inhabit in schools. Classrooms do not typically include 20-25 students carefully selected as exemplary teachers and learners and they do not consist of adults whose professional lives have committed them to solving the very problems that define the curriculum.

Writing project sites have had a significant impact on the culture of schools ... by introducing into the schools the same sorts of inquiry groups, case-study groups, and teacher-research groups that have operated so successfully (for them).

Still, it is true that all good teachers find some ways to foster authentic and engaged learning in their classrooms some of the time. And the surest methods or strategies or programs for instruction that are most likely, most often, to produce such learning are usually those that Fellows of a writing project site demonstrate to each other and to their colleagues in inservice programs. What the writing project provides more importantly than these strategies and programs of instruction, however, is an experience for teachers in a model community of learners, a model that works so well for most of the teachers who experience it, that they spend the rest of their professional lives trying to create some version of it in their classrooms, where the conditions of membership and daily life do not usually conspire to help them.

A cynic might say that the writing project is so unlike a classroom that the experience it provides has no relevance to the life world of the school. But good teachers are not cynics — at least not about their teaching. It is a standing joke among writing project teachers, many of whom are veterans of thirty or more years of teaching, that we continue to teach every year with equal anticipation because we are hoping to finally get it right. Which does not for a moment imply that for thirty years we have gotten it wrong. Rather, it speaks to our recognition of the difficulty that teaching presents to every teacher who continues to care about students and the challenges that each student and classroom present to us anew.

It is the case, I believe, that the writing project is and is not like our classrooms. It bears the same relationship to our classrooms, I would propose, as the Garden of Eden bears to the world we live in. We need a vision of Paradise, and are blessed through the writing project with an actual experience of such a learning Paradise, in order to set worthwhile goals and ideals for ourselves in the fallen world we actually inhabit. Just as importantly, the writing project, like the Garden of Eden, is just like the world we inhabit in our everyday working lives, in the sense that it remains vulnerable to the same threats and temptations to give up our task of learning either to adopt intellectually reductive but bureaucratically convenient answers to complex questions or to embrace a vision of hopelessness rather than possibility. If the

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Garden of Eden were not spiritually very much like the world we live in, Adam and Eve would never have been tempted and would never have been able to fall.

True Learning and False Knowledge

Significantly, I think, the principal temptation placed by God in the Garden of Eden is the temptation of knowledge, represented by the tree of knowledge and the tempting fruit hanging from its branches. And it remains the case that knowledge is the temptation we are obliged to resist and are assisted in resisting through the culture of the writing project. Knowledge is a temptation for us as it was for Eve in the Garden of Eden when it is offered to us as a substitute for learning. Eve falls intellectually before she succumbs to the temptation of the fruit, when she decides (as we see in Milton's inspired account of God's justice) that her ignorance renders her inferior to her husband and insufficient to endure the condition of her life of insecure happiness in the Garden — a life that is marked at almost every moment by opportunities to learn. Indeed, she is promised that if she remains obedient to the injunction against the knowledge represented by the fruit, she will grow in learning to the point where she will be able to move easily between the Garden and heaven itself.

But how can knowledge be a sin and how can Eve be faulted by divine justice for wanting knowledge? The answer is that knowledge is a sin when it is false knowledge, and it is always false knowledge when it is acquired without learning.

And how can you obtain knowledge without learning? You get it whenever you take as your knowledge the fruits of learning that you have not earned through your own learning experience. When, for example, you take somebody else's interpretation of a text as your own. When you take and reproduce as an answer to a problem a statement or procedure you have not understood for yourself. These are temptations because what they offer — if you take them as your knowledge — is a false knowledge, false in the sense that they do not derive from your experience as a learner and can only be possessed the way you possess objects or material wealth as something to display as a token of your status or value. And once your knowledge becomes the token of your value, it also becomes a stolen possession you are unwilling to surrender, and as such it becomes an obstacle to further learning. Thus we have two characteristics of false knowledge. First, it is knowledge that is false in the sense that it has not been acquired through learning, and it is false in the sense that it becomes an obstacle to further learning.

We are most inclined to use knowledge as a token of our value, moreover, when we have acquired it by devaluing ourselves in the act of betrayal against ourselves that we commit whenever we make the decision that we cannot tolerate the insecurity or sense of powerlessness we feel in not having definitive answers to the questions that puzzle and vex us. Our true power resides, however, in what we can mistakenly regard as our powerlessness, which is to say in our power to learn. For it is as learners that we express and manifest our most distinctive human quality as beings who grow and continue to grow intellectually and spiritually. The incapacity to learn, the refusal to change intellectually are the singular marks of those we classify as fools or mentally ill. And the attempt to prematurely take possession of knowledge that one has not earned through the slow but reliable process of growth and learning defines the sin of our first parents and the Faustian bargain with the devil.

For 25 years Jim Gray has been vigilant in warning the sites of the National Writing Project against embracing any fashionable theory of learning or teaching or any instructional reform — however promising or supported by research and theory — which might foreclose on alternative approaches and other answers put forward by a successful classroom teacher.

These literary and theological speculations, which may seem to mark a digression in my meditation on what we owe to James Gray and to the Bay Area Writing Project, are nevertheless relevant to the present occasion because they point to the purity of the writing project model as a model for learning even in the face of pressures to relinquish learning for the false gratifica-

—continued on p. 32

Welcome to Measurement, Inc.

BY DAVID GLOVIN

Last year reporter David Glovin of the Hackensack, New Jersey Record *paid a visit to Measurement, Inc., a North Carolina company that had read and scored the New Jersey state writing proficiency exams. Although many of the details in Glovin's article are specifically concerned with the testing program in New Jersey, the influence of Measurement, Inc., and similar companies goes far beyond the borders of that state. Each year the company scores 4 million essays from 25 states. Should outside companies such as Measurement, Inc. be hired to do this "piece work"? Is there a better way? We'd like to know what our readers think.*

In a boxy brick building sandwiched between tire stores and a sprawling factory in the heart of tobacco country, 70 North Carolina temp workers pass judgment on 100,000 New Jersey students.

This is where essays from standardized tests come to be scored—tests so important that high-school students cannot graduate without passing them, tests so vital that schools devote months to preparing for them.

But don't expect to find many teachers working here. Ron Tanner is a former fighter pilot who has scored 150,000 essays in three years. Jeff Haubner is a recent college graduate who came to Durham in search of a job. Karen Anderson scored papers as she was launching her art gallery. All told, they are a collection of college-educated jobbers who earn extra cash by evaluating the writing of New Jersey's youth.

Surprised that these readers are not teachers? New Jersey educators are. Not one of a dozen teachers or administrators interviewed, including several who managed testing programs, knew who scored the essays on these high-stakes exams. All assumed that the graders were teachers or other professional educators.

Nor are they aware that the graders for Measurement, Inc. erroneously fail at least a few students who produce acceptable essays. "We know we're not perfect," said Catherine Blue, a Measurement supervisor who oversees New Jersey's tests. "I don't expect to never change a score. If I think we scored it wrong, I change the score."

But the firm says errors are the exception and that virtually all papers are scored accurately by the part-time scorers. "I wondered . . . how professional people would be," said Tanner, the former pilot. "But it's incredible how seriously people take it. We're not just scoring papers. We're scoring people."

Essay Readers Get $7.75 an Hour Tops

Every October, 100,000 New Jersey juniors and seniors draft compositions as part of the High School Proficiency Test. Every November, the papers are shipped to Durham to be graded in a large, white-walled room.

Essays are now required from fourth- and eighth-graders, so 200,000 more will arrive in the spring. And the state plans to quadruple the number of essays demanded on the high school exam, which will add measurably to Measurement's burden.

It's an expensive process. New Jersey pays about $6 million a year to a testing company that helps create the eighth- and 11th-grade tests. That company, National Computer Systems, subcontracts the essays to Measurement, which receives up to $4.50 for every paper it grades. Test readers get no more than $7.75 an hour.

Is This the Best Way to Score Such Important Exams?

The state says yes. Two years ago, officials considered returning the scoring to New Jersey, but they concluded it would be too daunting to try to find enough teachers during the school year.

Besides, state officials say, Measurement does a good job. "You're talking about seven changes out of 80,000," said Clyde Reese, director of testing in the New Jersey Department of Education. "I don't think that's problematic."

A Measurement scoring supervisor agreed. "Teachers are no better trained to do this than we are," said Judith Pugh. "We don't have any preconceived ideas" about the students whose papers are being graded.

But teachers ask if it makes sense to use part-timers working in a former headache powder factory 500 miles from North Jersey. Indeed, when the company reviewed its scoring of 2,200 eighth-grade essays from New Jersey this spring, it found 24—or one in 92 —that deserved a higher grade. Others received grades that should have been lower, but the company doesn't lower scores during such reviews.

Welcome to Measurement, Inc.

"You would think people in education would be selected," said Joan Pra Sisto, a guidance counselor in the city of Passaic. "We know what we're looking for. To think it's just people doing it as a part-time job, and the importance of the test, it's surprising."

Neha Rana also has her doubts.

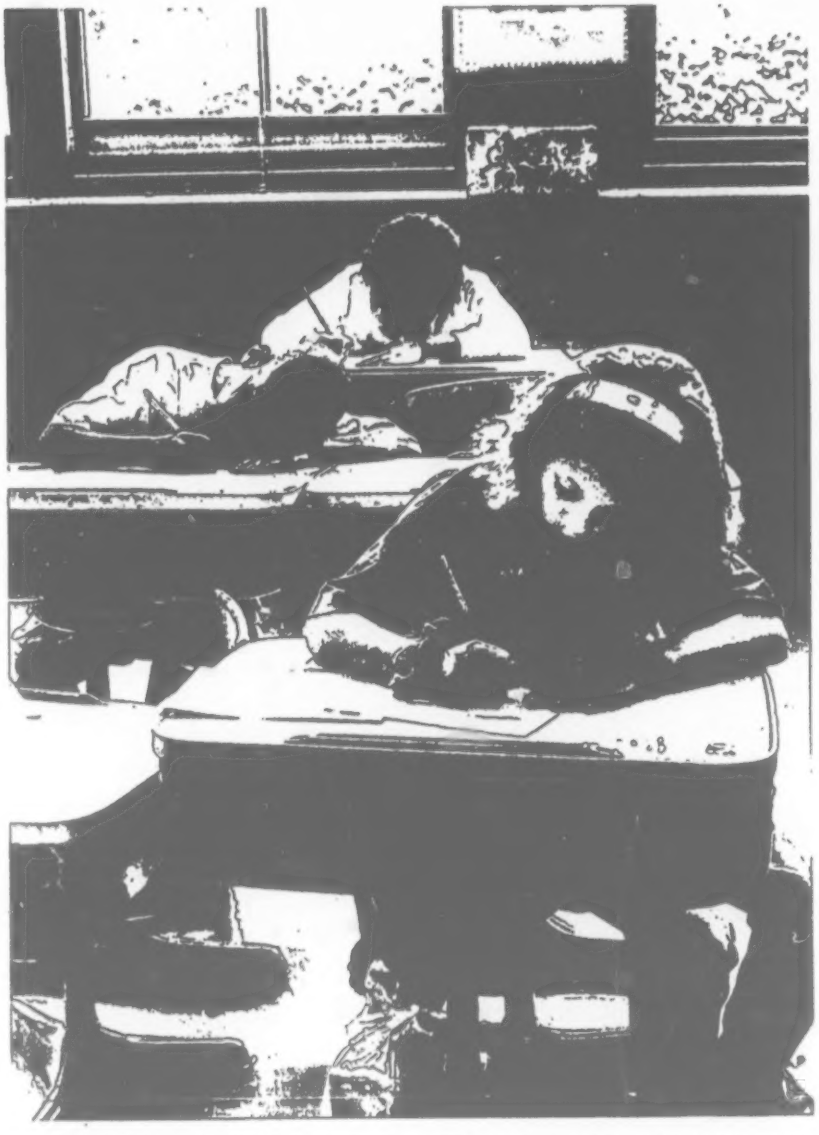
The Passaic teenager took the writing test in October 1997, and she was crushed when the results came back. "After they told me I failed, I started crying," said Neha, who hopes to attend Rutgers University next year. "The school switched my classes. They put me down from A-level classes to C-level classes."

There was one problem: Neha should have passed. For reasons she'll never know, graders mistakenly failed her and three classmates. She was pulled from a course in which she wrote research papers and spent months in remedial classes preparing to retake the test before the mistake was caught.

Even her guidance counselor could not help her. "I asked Ms. Pra Sisto if I could switch back" to more advanced classes, said Neha, 17. "She said no, I couldn't, because I failed."

Measurement officials note that schools can appeal questionable scores, as Passaic did with Neha's paper. Testing experts also praise the company's practices, saying no one can get every grade right.

"You can't achieve that ideal state," said Gregory Camilli, a Rutgers University education professor who serves as a testing consultant for New Jersey. "The idea is how much imperfection can you live with."



Readers Average 150 Papers a Day

That's a question Measurement confronted every day as it graded the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT). Throughout November 70 readers convened to decide whether students could write a basic essay. Schools learned the results in November.

It's an essay-readers' assembly line that scores up to 45,000 papers each day during peak season in the spring. There are rank-and-file graders, supervisory graders, and bonuses for the best graders.

Welcome to Measurement, Inc.

It is late morning at Measurement's headquarters, and a grader is confused. In one essay a teenager has weighed in favorably on animal rights, and the grader, who agrees with the student's politics, wants to know if that's a reason to raise the score.

Scott Cook, the lead scorer for New Jersey's test, says he cannot. What matters, Cook explains, is not substance but structure. Is the paper organized, detailed, and focused? Does it have an opening and closing? Do ideas flow from one to another?

"The hardest part is people come with different ideas about what good writing is, and we need to say this is not a creative activity," Cook says later. "We all work hard to judge writing in the same way because that gives kids the same opportunities. It shouldn't matter who picks up the paper."

That's almost Measurement's mantra. Evaluating good writing is highly subjective, influenced by a reader's internal measure of whether sentences sound good and make sense. But Measurement says it succeeds because it gives its readers a shared notion of good writing and bad.

Before they start, readers spend three days learning the grading scale created by New Jersey. The lowest score, a 1, is for papers that barely answer the question: they ramble, lack detail, and are sketchy. A high score, a 6, is for meaty expositions that show style and skill. A guidebook fleshes out the criteria, but it is still tricky.

"Some [graders] tend to score low, some people tend to score high, even after they've been trained," said a former Measurement supervisor who asked not to be named. "One hundred percent of these papers are not being scored accurately. I don't think that's a big surprise."

Consistency is a major concern for Measurement. Two scorers read each essay, and a student's final grade is the sum of the two scores. If the scores differ by more than one point, a supervisor must grade the paper.

"You could skim them very quickly. You could read them very fast," said Harrison, a freelance photographer. "You could actually — I know this sounds very bizarre — but you could put a number on these things without actually reading the paper."

Measurement says the two graders agree less than 60 percent of the time, but they score within one point of each other 98 percent of the time. Of 11,908 New Jersey papers graded on one November day, there were differences on 3,500.

That's a solid record, testing experts say. A one-point spread is expected because the quality of some papers cannot be easily pigeonholed. One grader may be impressed by a paper's organization, while another may he bothered by the sentence structure.

I asked two readers to grade the same essay, a response to a 1997 question asking if the speed limit should be raised (see box on p. 11). The paper, written by an 11th grader, was a sparse 190 words, loaded with grammatical mistakes and lacking the detail needed to support its arguments.

New Jersey offers this as an example of a paper deserving a score of 3 because it shows a partial command of writing. That's how Haubner, the recent college graduate, scored it. But a second reader deviated from New Jersey's guidelines and gave it a 4 because the ideas "flowed" from one to another.

The distinction matters. A paper that deserves a 3 should fail New Jersey's test, said Mary Ann Reilly, author of a book that prepares students for the HSPT. A paper that merits a 4 (adequate command of writing) should pass. A score of 7—arrived at by adding the two scores — usually passes.

Reilly is troubled by the lack of definitive thumbs-up or thumbs-down on papers on which one reader gives a failing 3 and the other gives a passing 4.

"A 7," she said, "is saying you have readers reading the same test, and one is saying there's command [of writing] and one is saying no command."

The HSPT is the most important test New Jersey administers. To graduate, students must pass writing, math, and reading sections. And while the writing demanded is only on a 10th-grade level, by 2001 New Jersey will toughen the test, survey more topics, and require four essays, not just one.

It is part of the state's effort to raise academic standards—that is, to demand more challenging courses in a broader curriculum.

Welcome to Measurement, Inc.

All of this is a break from the past. For years, state exams required mainly that students shade in answer grids to multiple choice questions. Quick to grade and with one correct answer, they offered a fast snapshot of student achievement and were not subject to whims of individual graders.

More recently, multiple-choice exams have fallen from favor. Critics say they test only memorization and test-taking skill. Essays, in contrast, force students to reason and compose logical thoughts.

"Educators generally consider that [essays] tap more complex skills, more higher-ended skills," says Camilli, a

Pass or Fail?

The Sunday *Record* of Hackensack, New Jersey asked two graders at Measurement, Inc. to evaluate an essay written by an 11th grader last year in response to a question about whether the state should raise the speed limit.

New Jersey distributes this as an example of a paper that shows only "partial command" of writing—a 3 on a scale of 1 to 6. The state says this essay does not meet the standard for competent writing and should fail the 11th-grade writing test. But the two readers offer differing opinions.

The essay has been reprinted with spelling and grammatical errors unchanged:

> *The contents of this article contains the many reason's why I feel that the speed limit should not be eliminated. For example, there would be a vast increase in vehicular accidents. These accidents would further effect the flow of traffic. This example would snowball into many more contraversial issues. One of the issues to be brought up would be that there would be so many accidents being caused by this elimination of the speed limit that the already high New Jersey automotive insurence would be increased to higher, more outrages rates.*
>
> *In my oppinion the biggest problem would be the uneccasary increase in deaths of drivers. Someone with two daughters a son and a husband could be on his ussual commute two work when all of a sudden sombodywho is taking advantage of this law by going 102 mph, smashes into the mother. Now that is why you ask the legislation why? Why increase the already high speed limit? Are there not already to many families without motheres.*
>
> *In conclusion, I hope I have shown you enough ressons to complain, and position this unessesary raise in the speed limmit.*

THE STATE'S CRITIQUE: "This short, sparse, organized response identifies several negative consequences (flow of traffic, accidents, insurance rates rise) of doing away with speed limits. The brief anecdote provides sufficient elaboration to help the response achieve a partial command of written language." Under the scoring system, this paper should get a 3 and would likely fail.

FIRST READER: This reader said the paper showed partial command of writing, and gave it a 3. He noted that the paper was too short and did not have much elaboration of its points.

SECOND READER: This reader said the paper showed adequate command of writing, for a score of 4. "There's not much information there, but it flows pretty good from one idea to the next."

PASS OR FAIL? The scoring system combines the scores of the two readers. So this paper would receive a 7, and, depending upon responses to short-answer grammar questions, the student probably would pass the state's writing exam.

Welcome to Measurement, Inc.

Rutgers education professor. "Educators also want these tests to send a message about what's valued" by the state — in this case, writing.

As a result, dozens of states now include essays on their exams, putting companies such as Measurement in the center of a vast reform movement. And that makes readers such as Karen Anderson, the North Carolina art studio owner, almost as important to New Jersey students as any teacher.

Although it has been three years since Anderson last scored papers, she recalls working for a company that was very concerned about quality.

Anderson began her job with three days of training. Reader-trainees who could not score essays accurately were fired. As she moved on to grading real tests, supervisors did spot checks to ensure accuracy, and computers were used to constantly check whether she graded higher or lower than her coworkers. Those whose scores consistently differed were retrained.

Anderson had only praise for her colleagues. At the time, she said, the local economy was weak and the job attracted many would-be professionals with master's degrees. All readers must have at least a bachelor's degree.

Anderson, for one, read papers from start to finish. "I never skipped over anything," she said.

That doesn't mean she liked her work. "It was the most boring job I ever had," said Anderson. "These papers are not that interesting. To sit in a chair each day and read the same simplistic thoughts—it made you lose faith in the way people wrote."

In the three years since Anderson last graded papers, the process has not changed, says Blue, the Measurement test director. Nor has it changed since Julion Harrison finished his fourth and final year of grading essays in 1993.

He remembers less conscientious readers. He was one of them.

Harrison read 10,700 papers in one two-month period. "There were times I'd be reading a paper every 10 seconds," he said. "It was horrific."

At one point, Harrison would only briefly scan papers before issuing a grade, searching for clues such as a descriptive passage within a narrative to determine what grade to give. "You could skim them very quickly. You could read them very fast," said Harrison, a freelance photographer. "You could actually — I know this sounds very bizarre — but you could put a number on these things without actually reading the paper."

The same quality-control measures that the company had in place when Anderson read papers were there when Harrison graded essays, and they're still used today. Still, like other readers, Harrison felt pressured to read his share of papers —and to earn the $200.00 bonus that kicked in after scoring 8,000 papers.

Measurement, Inc. Responds

We asked Measurement, Inc. CEO Henry Scherick to comment on David Glovin's article. He replied with the following telephoned response:

I met with David Glovin. He came down, visited our location, and we showed him around, allowed him to take pictures, took him to lunch…

I thought David, for the most part, did a nice job; he obviously needed to find some controversy, and was able to find a little bit. That'll always happen. We have to accept that as part of the territory, and understand that we do a good job in scoring tests and provide a valuable service to the industry. It's interesting that there are a number of school systems and school districts who have scored their own tests, whose teachers have quickly tired of that kind of activity and have now turned them over to companies like ours to score them. They find that it is a very burdensome job which they don't do well and they would rather pass on the responsibility to outside scorers. We're all in favor of better education and helping our kids, and contributing to that in whatever way that we can.

Welcome to Measurement, Inc.

He knows he gave some papers the wrong grade.

"Either I read it too fast or I didn't recognize what the child [meant] or maybe I got impatient because the child's handwriting was very bad," he said. "Maybe some of the readers weren't careful enough, and maybe a child got a 3 instead of a 4 or a 2 instead of a 4. Or maybe they failed."

Schools teach test-style writing

Passing the writing test is not very hard. For the October 1996 exam, the latest for which figures are available, all but three New Jersey high schools saw at least 85 percent of their students pass. Still, as the state moves to toughen the exam and add more essays, schools know their burden will grow.

Like it or not—and most educators do not—the public often compares schools on the basis of test scores alone. Even if a district is turning out educated and skilled students, superintendents have lost their jobs, and trustees have lost elections, if schools don't measure up.

Local schools have responded. Ridgewood now focuses less on in-depth writing and more on the quick essays demanded on the tests, said a former principal. Passaic is not the only district to banish failing students to remedial classes, and Paterson teachers say they are now less likely to teach poetry and creative writing so that they can concentrate on the exam.

In what some fear will actually lead to a dumbing down of writing, many schools now emphasize a five-paragraph essay format that they believe satisfies test graders — an introduction, three supporting paragraphs, and conclusion. Some HSPT-preparation books recommend that approach, and Paterson educators say they got a surge in eighth-grade writing scores by using it.

"We're basically making sure that our students write an essay in the format test graders want," said Little Falls Superintendent James Bender.

That mindset bothers some educators. "I think there may be penalties for creative thinking" on the essays, said Pamela George, an education professor at North Carolina Central University and a critic of standardized testing.

Test graders say it is only good writing they want to see, regardless of format. More important is that standardized testing has led to profound improvement in student writing. "Writing was in a horrible state when I started [scoring] in 1983," said Cook, the Measurement supervisor.

Now some readers actually gush over the quality of New Jersey's writing. "Whatever it is New Jersey is teaching these kids to write, the rest of the U.S. should be doing," added Tanner, the former pilot. "What we read is incredible. When you pick up a paper that is average for high school students [out of state], it's in the lowest group" among New Jersey students.

Failing grades appealed, corrected

In the end, Neha Rana passed the HSPT, but only because of a sharp-eyed teacher.

Convinced that she was too talented a writer to fail, Neha's remedial writing instructor urged the district to appeal her grade. It took months before Passaic got the results from Measurement's review but this time Neha and three classmates passed. "When I went back to English A, I had to make up a whole month's work," Neha said.

Neha's classmate, Pedro Portorreao, also went through the same ordeal—receiving a failing grade that was later overturned on appeal. "It made me feel like a lower class [student]," he said.

Passaic, however, was almost alone in appealing HSPT scores.

There were 49 appeals last year, and 40 came from Passaic. Other districts, including large ones such as Newark and Paterson, say they rarely appeal because students can sit for the test's next administration by the time schools receive appeal results.

Neha, though, was grateful that her school appealed. Besides interrupting the most important year of high school, the failure affected her self-confidence. She still feels wronged.

"I thought I wrote it the wrong way," Neha said. "I just thought it was me and my writing."

This article is reprinted with permission from the Hackensack, New Jersey Record. *A shorter version of this article also appeared in* Rethinking Schools.

Where's the Beef? Mississippi's Tech-Prep Initiative in Action

BY JOHN DORROH

When I first began teaching biology over 20 years ago, I did not see the need for venturing outside the walls of Room 23. After all, I had everything I needed there. My students were armed with their trusty textbooks and I had my podium. The only other necessary component was the blackboard for frequent note-giving while lecturing.

I cannot recall collaborating with any fellow teachers on class projects, nor did I ever consider connecting biology to other disciplines. The only writing done in my classroom occurred when my students followed a standard form for an occasional lab report, took notes copied verbatim from the board, and attempted to read my mind on occasional essay items on their exams. There was no technology to speak of, and I thought I was doing a great job. For those times, perhaps I was.

In contrast, my students now complete the interdisciplinary projects that make use of a highly integrated approach involving a wide range of skills and disciplines tied together within a framework of technology, and culminating in writing. This shift in my teaching began in 1988 with my participation in the Mississippi Writing Project Summer Institute, and has culminated in my recent participation in Mississippi's Tech-Prep initiative.

Tech-Prep is a carefully sequenced state-mandated program which aims to introduce students to the world of work and technology beginning in the 7th grade (see box for a summary of program features). The initiative evolved from a proposal from the Mississippi State Department of Education to the state legislature in 1994 to a statewide legislative mandate. The majority of the school districts in Mississippi now participate in Tech-Prep.

The goals of Tech-Prep include helping students make connections between their studies and work, and between academics and future vocations. To that end, Tech-Prep emphasizes integrated learning across disciplines; applied, hands-on instructional strategies; cutting-edge technology; and strong communication skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening).

What makes a Tech-Prep classroom different? For one, Tech-Prep classrooms are high-tech environments. Schools are equipped with ultramodern computer applications labs. At my high school, English and mathematics teachers now share Smart-Carts which come complete with a computer, videotaping equipment, and other gadgets, all on a roll-around cart. Some science teachers in our state have purchased computer-based lab calculators (CBL's) for their students to test environmental conditions such as water quality, including pH, temperature, and light intensity. In the teachers' lounge, one can often hear teachers sharing ideas about which computer program works best for certain classroom activities. All in all, more teachers than ever are collaborating and sharing equipment, coaching one another,

Mississippi's Tech-Prep Initiative

Interdisciplinary collaboration is only one aspect of Mississippi's extensive Tech-Prep initiative. The complete list of elements of Tech-Prep includes:

- high-tech classroom environments
- a Career Discovery course in the 7th grade
- a Computer Discovery course in the 8th grade
- a Technology Discovery course in the 9th grade
- implementation of applied learning methods
- articulated secondary and post-secondary vocational-technical programs and courses
- articulated secondary and post-secondary academic courses
- integration of vocational and academic skills into other courses
- sequential courses of study for grades 9-12 and 2-year/4-year college programs
- career centers in high schools
- assessment and documentation of academic and vocational skills gained by students
- work-based learning program
- a teacher-advisor Program

For more information about Mississippi's Tech-Prep, contact Associate Superintendent of Education Larry Jones, Mississippi Department of Education, (601) 359-3768.

Mississippi's Tech-Prep Initiative in Action

and enjoying the use of cutting-edge technology.

Another difference: the curriculum is performance-based. Instead of memorizing information, students now apply the subject content in a variety of real-world contexts. For example, students in a math and biology class work cooperatively to calculate the volume of pea gravel needed to cover the bottom of the school greenhouse. Students in a senior English class and those in a history class plan and coordinate a Renaissance dinner.

Perhaps most significant, Tech-Prep emphasizes course integration. Teachers are urged to work with other teachers, particularly outside their own disciplines. High school teachers in language arts, mathematics, and science are collaborating with vocational teachers to help their students perform several integrated activities throughout the year. (Of course, finding collaborative planning time to craft meaningful integrated activities is a constant challenge.)

One of the purposes of these integrated experiences is to help students see the relationship between academic and vocational courses. In fact, business and industry in our area are increasingly requiring their employees to have both academic and vocational skills. Students need to see and appreciate this connection, so Tech-Prep teachers take an integrated approach to teaching and learning. This integration ultimately eliminates the need to service two different kinds of students: the academically oriented and the vocation-bound.

Recently, my Anatomy & Physiology class undertook an activity with a vocational complex course, Business & Computer Technology. As part of a unit on digestion and nutrition, my students invited Mrs. Allen's B&CT classes to our lab to help determine if in fact ground turkey is more healthy than ground beef, as many nutritionists have led us to believe. One of the package labels on the ground turkey reads, "Contains 50% less fat than ground beef." Mrs. Allen and I challenged our combined classes to go into the lab and design and carry out an experiment to test the accuracy of this claim. They simultaneously compared the fat content of the two ground samples.

Before we ventured into the lab, we assigned our students to lab groups to ensure homogeneity. Next we suggested to them what materials — paper towels, ground beef and turkey, hot plates, frying pans, spatulas, old textbooks (for weights), and other standard lab equipment — they might use to design their experiment. As a class, we collaborated orally, deciding how big the patties should be. We also worked out other standard procedures, such as how to ensure that each patty was compressed with an equal amount of pressure after the cooking portion of the experiment.

In the lively discussion that followed, the students decided that each patty — ground turkey and hamburger — should weigh 25

Other Interdisciplinary Projects

Mississippi's Tech-Prep initiative for secondary and post-secondary students is designed to link academic disciplines with one another, with technology and with life and work. One feature of this extensive initiative involves Tech-Prep teachers working with one another to design interdisciplinary projects that emphasize applied learning. Some examples:

- French and biology students met together six times one semester to learn about French biologists such as Louis Pasteur. Teachers paired biology and French students, and each pair researched one French scientist, then wrote and performed skits about their scientist. Both teachers conducted mini-lessons emphasizing the connection between French and biology.
- Algebra II and biology students competed with one another in classroom-based math-science competition, simultaneously pulling together science and math facts using problem-solving strategies.
- English and history classes teamed to create a Holocaust Remembrance Week. Students interviewed veterans of World Wars, published memory booklets for each veteran, and collaborated with the veterans to create an unforgettable Remembrance Museum in the high school library.

Mississippi's Tech-Prep Initiative in Action

grams. Cooking time for each patty should be three minutes per side and then each patty should be wrapped in four double layers of paper towels, and an old textbook placed atop the stack. (The textbook, they explained, would "even out" the pressure being exerted upon each stack.) The students in Group 6 went as far as volunteering one of their own members to serve as the "standard squisher," realizing that the pressure exerted upon each stack should be the same for all lab groups. He happily accepted the challenge, moving from table to table, standing on top of the old textbooks, rocking gently from side-to-side in the prescribed "standardized squish" with a slightly comical manner.

We instructed the groups to keep detailed written notes. Once all of the groups had completed their experiments and cleaned up their stations, they made their calculations and entered the data onto a master data sheet which was taped to the board. Our results left some students surprised and outraged. The data showed that the ground turkey did *not* contain a significantly lower percentage of fat compared to the ground beef, and therefore the claim on the ground turkey package appeared to be untrue. "Let's sue them," several students said. Such statements led to a lively discussion of ethics in business.

Our next move was clear enough. After a discussion of the purposes and formats of business letters, my students, with the help of the B&CT students, wrote the grocery store manager where the products had been purchased. Each group worked together using computers to prepare a rough draft of the letter. The drafts were edited by Mrs. Allen, myself, and the students' peers. The students also prepared supporting graphs and/or tables to illustrate their findings. Mrs. Allen and I hand-delivered the letters to the manager of the grocery store where the beef and turkey had been purchased. I asked the manager to forward the letters to the appropriate companies.

West Point High School
P.O. Box 616
West Point, MS 39773
February 10, 1999

Manager
Winn-Dixie Marketplace
2312 Hwy 45 North
Columbus, MS 39701

Dear Mr. Betros:

Our Anatomy and Physiology class along with the Business and Computer class did an experiment to see if Ground Turkey had 50% less fat then Ground Beef. The label on the ground turkey states it has 50% less fat then ground beef.

First we made patties of ground beef and ground turkey weighing exactly 25 grams each. We cooked them for six minutes. Then we extracted the excess fat from the patties by putting them between 8 pieces of paper towel and adding 150 pounds of pressure. We weighed the patties again and discovered that the ground turkey had less fat, yet was not 50% less as advertised.

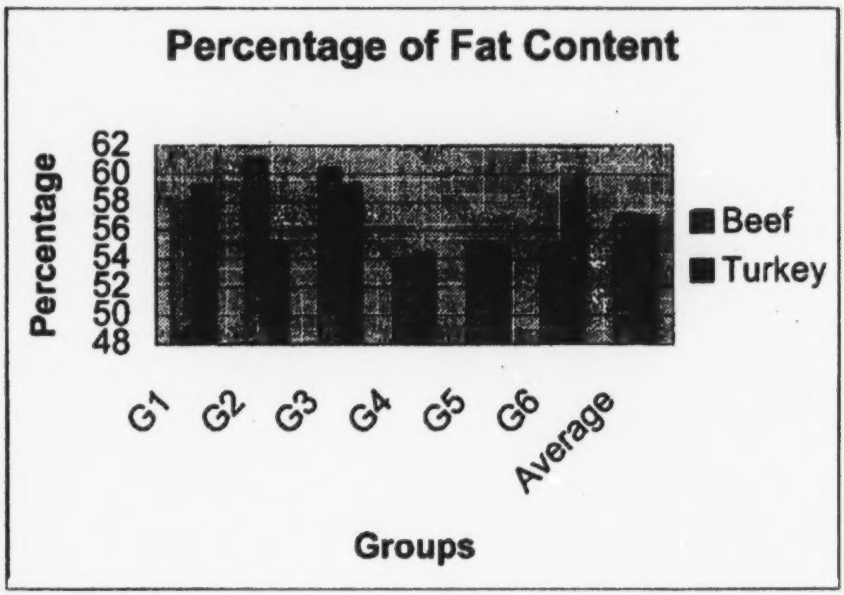
Enclosed is a chart indicating the results of the experiment performed by six different groups. You may want to share the results with Jeno's Meats, and we would appreciate your reply on our findings.

Sincerely,
(Tech-Prep students)

After we had delivered the letters, I heard some students say, "Those big corporation folks probably won't write back — they're too busy for us." Personally, I agreed with them. After a few days we had moved on to another unit and I simply forgot about the letters.

A month later, a parcel appeared in my mail box addressed to the Anatomy & Physiology and Business & Computer Technology classes. In it was a letter from the company, stating how much they appreciated our investigation. They detailed the procedures they use for analyzing the fat content of meat. Although their process is worth trying to repeat in our own lab, we do not

Mississippi's Tech-Prep Initiative in Action



have all of the equipment needed to tackle the job ... this year.

As an added bonus, the grocery store chain sent two checks, one for Mrs. Allen's class and one for mine. Some of my cynical and slightly hardened students announced, "That's hush money, Mr. D." Whatever the motive, my students enjoyed the pizza that the money bought, and Mrs. Allen's class purchased some canned goods for the community food bank.

In the course of this investigation, our students began to recognize scientists' need for strong writing skills to convey scientific findings, and consumers' need for strong writing skills to interact with businesses in a professional manner. As one of my students commented, "More people ought to write how they feel about products because someone actually listens." It was a valuable experience for all of us, and since that first experiment, we have repeated the process with other products, perfecting our experimental procedures with each effort.

As we reflected on our first collaboration, Mrs. Allen and I realized the powerful lessons this experiment taught our students. They learned that academics and vocational skills are vitally linked to one another: we had integrated biology, mathematics, some chemistry, and some ethics, and had practiced writing, editing, and publishing using the computer. Tech-Prep methodology provided Mrs. Allen and me with a means to collaborate to help our students get more out of their classroom experiences. We experienced firsthand how an interdisciplinary approach offers students a way to see how various disciplines interrelate in the world outside the classroom.

I believe Tech-Prep is achieving its goal. Many of our students have now begun to view school as a door through which they can step into a career. High school work has become more relevant as students get a head start on post-secondary training. They leave their senior year with identified marketable skills, and many more have a reason to stay in school.

John Dorroh is a teacher consultant with the Mississippi State University Writing/ Thinking Institute. He has taught high school science for 24 years and presently teaches at West Point High School in West Point, Mississippi.

You and Me and a Book Makes Three: Students Write Collaborative Novel Reviews With Adult Reading Buddies

BY BERNADETTE LAMBERT

Reading, writing, and thinking: these are the three critical components that drive every lesson in my sixth-grade classroom. I have learned, however, that my greatest success in engaging students with these activities occurs when I involve them in meaningful, nonthreatening, memorable moments of learning. Over time, I have developed one particular activity that consistently engages my students in literacy activities — and engages their parents as well: the "Adult Reading Buddy" project.

When I consider my own reading and writing habits, I understand that the more I do of both, the better I become at each. I believe that the same relationship holds true for my students. As the 1996 NCTE/IRA Standards for English Language Arts Report states, "Learners' repertoires of words, images, and concepts grow as they read, listen, and view" (p. 6). However, most students look skeptical when I describe my experience as a reader and writer. After all, I am a teacher, and they expect me to read and write a great deal. No matter how many times we have tried to practice "Drop Everything And Read," an activity that relies simply on silence, a book for pleasure reading and a "Be a D.E.A.R., Do Not Disturb" sign posted outside the classroom door, many of my students were not really reading. In fact, their restless expressions and relentless sighs indicated to me that they found little pleasure in this experience and had taken little ownership of the books that were staring at them each week. Reading was simply an assignment, not an opportunity to think or to write reflectively about their reading.

I refused to believe it was the type of books I made available to my students. My classroom and school media center are filled with wonderful stories that should appeal to students' diverse reading interests and comprehension levels. Yet my students rarely read on their own for pleasure. I wanted to encourage them to make their own diverse choices. Ironically, it was the success of a whole-class novel study that prompted me to create an interactive reading and writing project which, as it evolved over two years, eventually allowed me to honor the diversity of my classroom through integrated reading and writing. We were about to read *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, a novel that many teachers in my school system will not touch as a sixth-grade class study because they fear it is too risky. Its subject matter — euthanasia and sexual awareness — are often taboo in the middle school classroom. To find out how parents felt about their children reading the book, I sent home permission slips and invitations to read the book and offer feedback.

Of course, many parents simply signed the form, but at least a dozen parents took the time to read the book and respond to me. While none of them objected to the class reading, many offered suggestions and proposed questions that the students could answer in response to the book. One parent thought the book would be better in seventh grade instead of sixth, as she believed sixth graders might be offended or disturbed by the act of euthanasia, or "releasing," as it is referred to in this futuristic novel. She suggested that students consider what had prompted the society in the book to develop such strict rules and how long it would take to "change a society's perception." Another parent wrote that he thought the book did "an excellent job of adapting 1984 to a youth level." He even commended me on my choice of reading material. I read the parents' letters to the students. We now had a three-way dialogue for the book —parent-student-teacher — which resulted in the best classroom discussion about a novel that I have ever experienced.

I was curious as to what might happen if more parents were engaged in the discussion. My sixth-grade public school students come from varied backgrounds. Ethnically, culturally, and economically, my community is one of the most diverse in the state of Georgia, and this diversity is reflected in my classroom. Parent involvement is often limited to a small group of stay-at-home mothers. Our work with *The Giver* suggested a way to generate more parent participation. I designed a simple plan that would allow parents to spend meaningful learning time with their children.

I called the project, "Read With Me Book Reviews." I explained that the objective was for a student and parent (or significant other adult) to read the same novel and write independent reviews, and, based on

You and Me and a Book Make Three

their reading, to make recommendations for the class library. I decided not to go with the traditional book report for the same reasons Nancie Atwell explains:

> *No one writes book reports except students in school; no one reads them except teachers. But the book review, a genre that exists in the real world, invites students to discover their passion — and their prejudices — as readers and to teach others what they find in a book so engagingly that others will want to look for it, too.* (1998, p. 470)

Choosing a Book

I began by asking students to select a novel, generating excitement from the students when I explained that this time they could choose any title they desired. However, as many students benefit from guidance as well as freedom, I decided to provide some suggestions.

In order to formulate a list of suggested readings, I first surveyed parents and students about their own reading habits and choices. What were the topics, I wanted to know, that parents did or did not want their children to read about? The results of the survey indicated that most parents wanted their children to read about character-building values and multiculturalism, but did not want them to read about ghosts, sex, or death. The students indicated somewhat opposite views in their responses: they wanted to read mysteries, ghost stories, and adventures. I used the results to compile a bibliography that included 30 titles. Over two-thirds of the students selected a book from the list. However, others chose a book with a parent. One mother wanted to read *Whatever Happened to Janie?*, the sequel to *The Face on the Milk Carton*. When she visited the class to share with her daughter she said, "If I had to read a book, I wanted to read the sequel to a book I have read years ago with my older daughter."

The five favorite choices from my list were *Fat Chance* by Leslea Newman, *Going Through the Gate* by Janet Anderson, *Nightjohn* by Gary Paulsen, *Scorpions* by Walter Dean Meyers, and *The Thief* by Megan Turner. The favorite choice not on my list, but soon to be added, was *Holes*, the 1999 Newbery winner by Louis Sachar. Five boys read and praised the book.

Many memorable student-adult combinations emerged. One boy read The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe *with his mother, who had read the entire series as a child. He began his presentation for the class by saying, "This assignment was fun for me because it gave me a chance to read with my mom!"*

Finding a Partner

In addition to selecting a book, students needed an adult partner to share in their reading. This partner could be anyone over the age of 18. The majority of students selected a parent, but several asked an older sibling, grandparent, cousin, or neighbor to be a reading buddy. Imagine the joy of a parent and child searching the book store or library for a book to read together! Most students reported that this experience was the most powerful and memorable part of the assignment. Knowing that a few students would not find someone to commit to reading an entire novel and responding to it, I asked several teachers and administrators to volunteer to be reading buddies as well.

Once students selected their buddies and each pair selected their novels (a process that took one week), I asked each parent and student to sign a commitment form. All but five of my 85 students returned the form signed; these five were given teachers as reading buddies. Unfortunately, three parents still did not complete the task as they had promised to do in signing the commitment letter. Despite their parents' failure to complete the assignment, the three children each read and published the student portion of the project as required.

Many memorable student-adult combinations emerged. One boy read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* with his mother, who had read the entire series as a child. He began his presentation for the class by saying, "This assignment was fun for me because it gave me a chance to read with my mom!" He added that he is planning to read the entire series over the summer break — like his mom did when she was a kid.

Another interesting reading duo was a father and daughter who selected *Fat Chance*, a book about eating disorders and

You and Me and a Book Make Three

adolescence. The father wrote in his review, "I must admit the prospect of reading a book about a teenage girl with an eating disorder left me with more than a little trepidation. However, in less than ten pages my fears were gone and I was hooked." After reading the book, he and his daughter searched the web for information about eating disorders. She was proud to share their findings with her peers.

Sharing the Reviews

Indeed, all students had to share their reading experience with the class. The process began with a written book review which focused on one of four elements of the book: plot, characters, setting, or theme. If students wrote about the plot, they were taught to go beyond summary, indicating, for instance whether the plot was predictable, surprising, or disappointing and supporting their opinions with facts and details from the text. Some students analyzed how characters developed and changed in the course of the book, or they related setting and theme to either the plot or the character development.

Our class discussions of *The Giver* gave students a model for analyzing their own book choices. As we discussed the changes that the protagonist of the book undergoes in the course of the novel, students were able to recognize similar changes in the characters in their own books. The class conversations about the utopian setting and the book's strong messages gave the students several examples of how to approach the review while focusing on setting or theme.

Although the reading buddy had also committed to writing a review, some had trouble completing this assignment. Students were surprised to discover that they were not the only ones who have trouble finishing schoolwork. Several reported their parents' frustrations at having to carry out a writing assignment. As one student put it, "My mom says she doesn't do homework anymore."

Such responses heightened my concern that students would be unfairly penalized if parents didn't follow through, so I adjusted the adult contribution percentage of the grade to only 10%. Further, I made it known that I would not evaluate the reading buddy's writing for anything more than its completion.

However, I need not have worried. The reading buddies wrote strong reviews, and I could see some effects of parents' modeling in the students' own work. In most cases the parent and student pieces were organized in a similar fashion and about the same length. However, some parents and children disagreed in their reviews. For instance, one boy who read Paulsen's *Brian's Winter* was disappointed because "it wasn't as interesting as *Hatchet*" (another book by the same author). But the boy's grandmother and reading buddy wrote, "I couldn't put the book down at all once I started reading." Her grandson believes she would have felt differently if she read *Hatchet* first.

A mother-daughter team that read Cisneros' *House on Mango Street* agreed that they both learned a great deal from the book. The mother wrote, "I tried to reflect on the parallels between Esperanza ... and my own half Latino daughter." She added that

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she initially thought the "similarities began and ended within the first chapter," but later found that by the end of the book "the similarities became so very clear." She wrote that both her daughter and Esperanza are proud dreamers who are strong in spirit and live life with passion. Her daughter wrote that she realized "that just like Esperanza, many people today face the same problems she did and some people don't end up so lucky by the end of their story!"

As with other assignments, some students turned the project in late, and a few brought apologetic excuses from parents who were guilty of not following through. For the most part, however, having a buddy who is also responsible for reading and writing about the same book by the same deadline helped both partners become aware of the pacing required to finish on time.

In addition to the written review, I asked students to make a visual presentation. They were to fold a sheet of 12" X 18" construction paper into three sections. In the middle section, I asked them to illustrate their original ideas for a new cover for the book; the redesigns of the book covers helped the students to express what they thought was important about the book they had read. When it was time to share, many students were more excited about explaining the new book cover than about reading the reviews.

After the reviews were written, students placed their reading buddy's review on one side of the presentation board and their own on the other. In addition, each reader added a symbol reflecting his or her overall feeling about the book. Some used thumbs up or thumbs down, and others used smiling faces, stars, or check marks. One very creative student used 5 baseballs instead of stars to indicate her recommendation of *Maniac Magee*, a book about baseball.

I encouraged students to make their work aesthetically appealing. They decorated their projects using colored paper, stickers, stars, and magazine pictures. In the end, my students proudly shared and displayed their final products.

I had hoped parents would visit our classroom on the day of the buddy presentation. One year I asked students to invite their parents themselves, but no parent came. However, when the following year I extended the invitation myself, including it in the commitment letter that parents signed at the onset of the project, four parents attended, and more students said they wished their parents could have come. Whether or not parents made a personal appearance, their voices were heard and respected in our classroom through their written reviews.

Only a handful of parents wrote that they did not like the book selected by their child. One mother who had earlier read and enjoyed *The Giver* expressed her dissatisfaction with another book by Lowry, *Number the Stars*. While the parent provided excellent arguments making a case against the book, her daughter wrote a review detailing the reasons why she thought it was a good book.

Some of the parents described what they had learned as a result of the readings. For example, one mother wrote that she did not know until after reading *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston that Japanese Americans were sent to live in internment camps during the 1940s.

I need not have worried. The reading buddies wrote strong reviews, and I could see some effects of parents' modeling in the students' own work.

The students' responses were equally fascinating. Most were proud to share a piece of writing done by a parent, and several admitted that this project marked the first time that they had shared this level of intellectual conversation with their parents.

Overall, the project elicited countless rewards — some that go beyond what I will be able to witness. Students received powerful role models of lifelong learning. Cooperating parents had an opportunity to bond with their children. The entire class discovered the joy of reading and writing.

Yet the biggest reward was mine. I learned that I could touch the lives of not only those in my classroom, but also those in my community. I was able to share the projects during a summer conference sponsored by our National Writing Project site's Project Outreach leadership team. Participating teachers were thrilled to take back to their classrooms an idea that would invite parents to become part of the ongoing

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literacy dialogue. Elementary, middle, and high school teachers discussed adapting this project for different age levels. High school teachers were concerned about the possible lack of parental involvement, but many vowed to try it. Back in the classroom, American Studies teacher Dave Winter of Wheeler High School in Marietta, Georgia experienced success not only with the parent-to-student dialogue, but with the student-to-student dialogue as well. Dave writes:

> *I know this happens often in the middle school classroom, but the proposition that reading is enjoyable and that students might share texts with each other is a tough sell in high school. This project provided a space where such sharing could occur with the teacher out of the conversation as he must be for such sharing to take place.*

Since last summer, I have met several teachers who have borrowed and modified this project. I am always flattered when I hear about it as a success story from a teacher I have never met. My original goal was to enhance the dialogue among parents, teachers, and students. I never imagined that I would also discover my own "reading buddies," as I am now able to join some of the professional conversations among teachers who are working collaboratively to meet the needs of literacy development in our communities. What better way to model the reading, writing, and thinking that I expect from my students!

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Bernadette Lambert is a teacher consultant with the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project and is a member of Project Outreach, a network of the National Writing Project. Currently she is a literacy specialist in the Cobb County schools. This article is based on her experience as a teacher at East Cobb Middle School in Marietta, Georgia.

Building a Story: The Art of Narrative

BY MARILYN BATES

"When short story season rolls around, I live with a sense of dread. I know I'll have to read endless pages of scrawled, dead prose about Rambo-like robots shooting their way to heaven — it's discouraging, to say the least" (Larson, 1993, p. 2). This lament by a high school English teacher typifies the difficulty of teaching students how to write a short story. Often times first-person memoirs by students sound like a recap of what happened at the prom or a conversation about the big party at someone's house on Saturday night. Student writers may follow the instructor's directions carefully, detailing who the characters are, what they look like, and their mannerisms, but their narrations lack the scene development and timing that turn a piece of writing into a story.

Teaching students to write stories is a complicated process, because the finished product involves several components that are difficult to teach simultaneously: building a scene to a climactic moment, creating dialogue, and developing character. How does one teach all of the elements of a good story and get students to incorporate them into the final product?

I use a multistage procedure, teaching what I shall call "the incident" first; then dialogue, and finally a character sketch, which often lengthens into a short story. Each assignment's goal should contribute to the next assignment's development. That is, the lesson of the incident, which relies on timing and scene development, is incorporated into the dialogue assignment; and both of these lessons into the character sketch. Students may develop three different scenarios, but some become so enthralled with their work that they carry the same basic story through all three stages. Others write a completely new scenario for each assignment.

The Incident

I kick off my short story unit by asking students to describe an "incident." The incident should encompass one moment in time — not be carried into the next day, or week, or even overnight. The moment in time must build to a climax, with the emphasis on timing. I point out that a well-timed climax has much in common with a well-told joke: timing is everything. I ask students to focus at this stage on storytelling as opposed to dialogue, although a small exchange may occur to maintain the action of the episode.

I tell students to avoid writing about arrests for traffic violations, automobile accidents, illegal teenage parties involving drugs and alcohol, or mob executions. These make awfully dull incidents, and a proliferation of such tales makes the teacher's job tedious. Additionally, I don't permit students to kill anyone off in their incidents, a practice which invites *deus ex machina* endings and plots with little thought.

A good source for samples of the incident can be found in *Flash Fiction*, edited by James Thomas (1992), particularly Julia Alvarez's "Snow" and Michael Delp's "Draft Horse." Although the incident assignment need not be a completed story, as are these two examples, both of these stories focus on a single happening in which a scene is developed.

The Dialogue

Now I ask students to create dialogue. I want students to strive for dialogue that develops character and that imitates real speech. I provide the following list of pitfalls students encounter as they write dialogue.

1. Too much narration mixed in with the dialogue.

2. Too many buffers (he said, she saw, they observed, etc.).

3. Telling rather than showing (using "he said alarmingly, angrily, noisily," etc., instead of having the dialogue reveal these actions or emotions).

4. Dialogue that addresses the reader rather than other characters (tells us things other characters already know or lectures readers).

5. Too many dialogue descriptors (he announced, she chided, etc.). Remember, "said" is always the best.

6. Consistently using whole, formal sentences, or consistently writing logical and sequential dialogue. Real speech is not smooth and flowing. In fact, one character may not entirely hear what the other is saying because he is thinking up a reply while the other is speaking. Instead, a writer should try to catch verbal tics and overlapping speech.

Then, my students and I look at some models. We examine Paul Zindel's *The Pigman*. Students do not have to read the entire book, just the first four pages of

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Chapter Six. I preview these pages by telling students that Lorraine is a high school student who lives with her mother, a private duty nurse. The mother, a divorcee, takes care of the terminally ill. The dialogue in this section of the book contains an excellent delineation of character and reveals the essence of this mother-daughter relationship. As students sift through the dialogue, they find that Lorraine's mother:

- is distrustful of men — she tells Lorraine they only have "one thing" on their minds;
- has little compassion for the sick people she attends — "The old guy's throat was closing, and he was bouncing up and down in bed for days"; and
- makes Lorraine feel guilty about any normal expenses associated with child-rearing — "Twenty-three bucks for a dental certificate! I can't even afford to get myself a pair of nylons."

Another excellent source for dialogue instruction is Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants."24 The dialogue in this story contributes to the reader's understanding of the setting as well the situation. The author creates a sense of tension and conflict in the relationship between two world travelers who, trying to enjoy themselves as tourists in Spain, are unable to do so because of the underlying issue they face: an unmentionable, unwanted pregnancy and an impending abortion. In this skillful dialogue characters never make clear the nature of the upcoming "operation." The readers are left to deduce the circumstances as the characters talk around the topic.

The dialogue reveals not only the situation, but also the relationship between the characters.

The girl begins: "I'll do what you want to." "If you don't want to you don't have to. I wouldn't have you do it if you don't want to." Further dialogue gives us insight into the way the characters have lived their lives: "That's all we do—look at things and try new drinks."

Real speech is not smooth and flowing .... A writer should try to catch verbal tics and overlapping speech.

After studying models such as these, students are better prepared to write dialogue that emphasizes character development and less likely to go back to the incident and focus on the story.

However, after the dialogue is completed, students are expected to incorporate the incident — still focusing on a moment in time and building toward a climactic moment. But now the structure is achieved through a conversation between two people.

Finally, students incorporate into their piece the appropriate movements, vocal intonation and facial expressions that are collectively known as "body language." I offer students one exercise that allows them to incorporate body language.

They list the steps in a simple chore — washing the car, typing and saving information on a disk, cleaning out the garage, folding clothes removed from the dryer. Now the writer can integrate the body movements associated with the chore into a conversation with another character.

One student responded to this exercise with the following. The italicized lines are examples of body movement.

> *Carrie pulled back the lever of the dishwasher and opened the steaming door.* "Mom," she said, "do you think I could stay over at Allie's after the dance on Saturday?" *She handed the warm casserole to her mother who was stacking the clean dishes on the shelves.*
>
> "I don't know why you can't come home. You know I love to hear how it went," her mother said. *She buffed the bottom of a copper skillet and hung it on the rack of shiny bottomed pans hanging over the stove.*
>
> *Carrie was quiet for a moment, taking out the silverware, methodically placing it in the mahogany chest on the dining room table.* "Mom, sometimes you treat me like a baby," Carrie complained. "I mean, it's just to Allie's."

The Character Sketch

Finally, students write a character sketch which is launched with what I call the "landmark assignment." I ask the students to visualize themselves in the vicinity of a famous landmark in their home town, one with which they are thoroughly familiar.

In Pittsburgh, for example, there is the clock on the corner of Kaufmann's department

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store, a location where many passersby wait for a bus or gather to meet friends. Standing under the clock is a person whose mannerisms seem vaguely familiar to the writer, yet he or she is unable to make out the character's face from a distance. Maybe the sense of familiarity comes from the way the character tilts a head, holds a raincoat over the shoulder, or leans against the building. Perhaps the character is walking toward the clock, exhibiting a stride reminiscent of someone the writer knows, or is dressed in torn jeans, Phillies' baseball cap worn backwards and a black leather jacket, a style the writer associates with a particular individual.

I point out that a well-timed climax of a story has much in common with a well-told joke: timing is everything.

Then I give the writers a first line prompt to begin their own writings: "From a distance, I could tell it was _____ (name a person) by the way he or she _____." Next I ask students to describe the person's mannerisms, a good technique for incorporating physical description into a writing without making it sound like a post office "wanted" poster. Here is one student example:

Sara glanced through the smog-filled air, catching a glimpse of a familiar figure just as a bus choked to a stop on the corner. It looked like Mark, but suddenly the figure had turned, the broad expanse of his back facing her. She stepped off the curb, zigzagging through the maze of cars in her path, trying to make out if it was really Mark standing next to the newspaper stand. His jeans hugged a well-toned physique, a small tear in his left knee. Standing with his weight solidly rooted on one leg, the other bent as he propped his foot against the traffic light post. His thumb was unconsciously hooked through the belt loop of his pants. A slight wind blew, ruffling his deep brown hair. He tossed his head, shifted his weight to the other foot, and finally turned in her direction. Yes, it was Mark all right. She hadn't seen him since they graduated from high school, two years ago.

This technique leads to lively writing and away from flat narrations that sound like a conversation with a friend about a Saturday night football game. The writer is immediately involved in the scene he or she is creating, because he indicates his position relative to the person at the landmark. Right away the reader gets a sense of Sara's intrigue with a character from her past, the description of his body language hinting at his relaxed, slightly unconventional behavior.

Once the characters are introduced and the setting is developed in the landmark exercise, the next step is to have the narrator interact with the character. Here is Part II of "Sara and Mark" who have just reunited under the Kaufmann's clock:

"Mark," she called out, her voice timid at first.

Trying to conceal his surprise, Mark stammered, "Sara? Sara Cromer?" His lips curled into a wide grin.

"Yeah. I saw you from across the street and thought I'd stop and see how you were." Her left hand nervously twisted the gold charm that hung from a delicate chain around her neck.

"I'm back for the holiday break. I'll be in town for a couple of days, then off to my dad's in New York."

"Well, what are you doing for your vacation?" she asked.

Looking down at the cigarette butts littering the sidewalk, he says, "My mom has this thing for nagging people to death. I, ah, just couldn't hang around the house anymore." He stared intently at Sara.

Her cheeks flush a little. "I understand. My mom gets that way sometimes too." She looks over at the pigeons waddling on the pavement. Her stomach fluttered with the same feeling she got every time Mark trudged through the door to Chemistry class, three minutes late. She thought of his wisecracks, the crooked smile. Her face became serious as she mustered the courage to say, "Um, well, what are you doing today?"

"Nuthin', exactly. I'm trying to scrounge up a few bucks. I'm busted flat."

By now the reader is intrigued with the characters introduced in this opening scene, which comes alive in a dramatic way.

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Because the narrator is immersed in the story, the student-writer becomes an active participant in the drama depicted.

Later, Mark asks Sara out to a party —

Startled by his invitation, Sara responded sounding a little more eager than she wanted, "I'd love to!"

After copying her phone number down, Mark tossed out suggestions, "How 'bout we go to a party? My friend, Charlie, is having a bash at his place. Parents in Florida this week. Should be pretty crazy. Always are." Pausing, he offered another suggestion, "Or, we could head over to this type club I go to. It's called Obsession. There's always a crowd there. I know the bouncers so I shouldn't have a problem getting you in."

Sara now has doubts about Mark, but agrees to go with him. Just as she is about to depart, a skinny man with greasy hair walked over to Mark. His bloodshot eyes stood out against his pallid skin. Looking over at her warily, he said, "Are we gonna take care of this here?" Instinctively, she stepped behind Mark, clutching his arm. "Manuel, I'll meet you across the street in a minute. I just want to finish here," he said, nodding in Sara's direction.

The man walked across the street toward the bench on the other side. "What did that man want?" Sara asked, not really needing an answer. So many emotions rioted inside her mind, her heart pounding out of control.

Mark took her hand, "Sara, I don't know what to say to you," his voice sounded out in a low rumble.

"What is there to say?" Sara said, her voice trailing off, leaving the words unspoken.

When students have practiced techniques for storytelling and are launched into assignments spontaneously, they often write freely about deep emotional issues, the story becomes the outward manifestation of their psychological interiors. Their characters take on real-life personalities because they develop scenarios that come from past experience, the expressive content of their stories serving as a kind of "objective correlative" for their emotional state.

According to Gabrielle Rico, storytelling has cathartic and therapeutic value: "Although the emotions reach beyond language, it is words, used evocatively and metaphorically, which make patterns of our quagmire of feelings. Through the complex system of sounds we call language, we reach constantly toward expression. Through expression, we grope our way out of the quicksand of emotional reaction onto solid emotional ground" (p. 118). The classroom instructor, then, becomes a valuable catalyst, enabling students to tap into their richest sources of storytelling.

But I have found that my students are most likely to benefit in the way Rico describes if they are provided with a structure that encourages them to move from incident to dialogue to character.

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Marilyn Bates is a TC with the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project and teaches at Mt. Lebanon High School, Pittsburgh, PA.

Writing Workshop and Real-World Learning: A Deweyian Perspective

Jo-Anne Kerr

In 1971 Janet Emig's landmark study, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders,* ushered in what is now commonly referred to as the "process approach" to teaching writing. Emig's study and subsequent studies focusing on the processes that writers engage in, rather than on only the products they produce, began to inform pedagogy and, in part, gave rise to writing workshop, a type of writing class in which students learn to write by writing and by sharing their writing with others.

Whereas in traditional writing classes students are assigned topics and may only write one draft of a piece, in writing workshop students:

- write on topics of their own choosing,
- use sustained periods of time to work through multiple drafts of each piece, and
- elicit responses from one another and from the teacher.

These three ingredients — ownership, time, and response — are essential components of all writing workshops, allowing students to function as real writers while they concurrently develop their proficiency with written language.

Nancie Atwell is probably the best known writing workshop practitioner. *In the Middle: New Understandings about Writing, Reading, and Learning* (1998) details her model of writing workshop for middle-level learners. In her book, Atwell describes the importance of ownership, time, and response. For instance, she catalogues the variety of topics tackled by her students when she allowed them to write about ideas they generated themselves. For Atwell, allowing her students freedom of choice helps them take responsibility for learning about writing and about the devices and techniques available to writers (p.15). Atwell also advocates the practice of providing frequent and regular time for writing, believing time is important for helping students write well and for allowing them to consider and think through their ideas. Time helps student-writers produce clear, coherent, and logical writing (p. 91). Finally, Atwell asserts the importance of response for writers, noting that writers want to know how to improve themselves and desire response that will help move them "forward" without "condescension" (p. 117).

It is generally acknowledged that ownership, time, and response allow students to act like real writers. Students produce a great deal of writing and, in the process, develop their writing skills. But there are other generally overlooked benefits to the workshop process which indicate a service that goes well beyond the context of writing workshop — and the context of school. In order to recognize this service, we can recast these three essential components of writing workshop in light of John Dewey's philosophy of education, which puts particular emphasis on education as preparation for life. In doing so, it is then possible to "re-vision" writing workshop to see potential benefits for participants beyond improved student writing; in fact, writing workshop also helps students develop essential life skills.

Mrs. Malone's Eighth-Grade Writing Workshop

In order to re-vision writing workshop's essential components as fundamental life skills, we will take a look at one particular writing workshop.

Mrs. Malone's writing workshop consisted of 21 eighth-graders: 11 girls and 10 boys representing a range of ability levels. Mrs. Malone was committed to a process approach to the teaching of writing and had wholeheartedly embraced a writing workshop format. Her overarching goal for her writing class was for students to see themselves as writers, and, accordingly, she incorporated ownership, time, and response into her class to help students realize this goal.

Mrs. Malone believes that students write best from their expressive center, and so she gave her students many opportunities to write what she called "personal projects," pieces of writing on self-selected topics. She also values sustained periods of time for writing and so incorporated into her writing workshop periods of "quiet writing" which she gradually extended over the course of the year. Finally, seeing writing as a social endeavor, Mrs. Malone conferenced with students and gave them myriad opportunities to share their writing, with partners, in small groups, and with the class as a whole.

I observed Mrs. Malone's writing workshop over a period of eight months. The following vignettes reflect what I observed and illustrate the dual services that writing workshop can provide: a preparation for real world writing and a preparation for life.

Writing Workshop and Real-World Learning

Ownership: Students Building Interactions With the Curriculum

As I wandered through the classroom, I noticed the afternoon sun streaming through the windows on this early spring day. I knew from experience that the room would soon grow hot — as much from the energy generated by the students as from the sun. I eventually settled near Amber, Suzanne, and Lisa, who were discussing what they would be working on today. Suzanne told Amber, "I'm going to write about my cousin's wedding. There's nothing else going on." Amber announced that she would be writing about the recent cheerleading competition in Williamsburg, Virginia. From another cluster of desks, I heard Michele talking about the story she was drafting. Here I witnessed the freedom that students enjoyed when working on what Mrs. Malone calls "personal projects."

While we know, intuitively and through scholarship and research, that better products can result when students are given this freedom (Atwell, 1998; Caulkins, 1994; Graves, 1994; Reif, 1992), there are additional benefits worth considering. Two pieces that Amber wrote suggest the value of allowing students to "own" their writing. Although Amber announced that she would write about the cheerleading competition, she ultimately wrote about an incident that occurred on the way home from Virginia. "The L.V. Cheerleading/ McDonald's Scandal" recounts the unsettling experience of being left behind at a restaurant on the way home. The bus had stopped at a McDonald's, and while Amber was on the phone, the bus left without her and another cheerleader. After waiting two hours, Amber and her friend were "rescued" by her friend's father. Amber vividly recalls in her piece the outrage she felt when she became aware that apparently no one on the bus realized that the two were missing. At the end of her account, told in diary form, she added this paragraph:

> *I hope you know my reason for writing this was completely selfish. I didn't write it to inform, or to bad-mouth cheerleading.* I wrote it to help myself deal with the situation. *I believe I'm a better person now and more understanding of these things* (emphasis added).

In another piece Amber again implied her emerging understanding of the potential that writing has to help her understand and learn from her experiences when she wrote about the many moves that her family had been through. At one point in her narrative, she describes how she felt when she found that she would have to leave a school that she liked and the new friends that she had made: "No! We can't! I just got used to it here. Why does everything have to change?"

At the end of her piece, Amber wrote the following:

> *I didn't like moving at first, but now when I think about it, I think it really helped build my individuality and character. It helped me to become more well-rounded. I'm glad that I had the opportunity to move around. I sometimes wonder if, given the same opportunity, my friends would grow and mature in the ways I did.*

Even the title Amber chose, "Moving: Good or Bad?" reflects her awareness of how her writing moved her to change how she felt about this experience. Writing gave her the time to think and a means by which to articulate this thinking, which then led to understanding and awareness.

Other students in Mrs. Malone's class also used writing to help them deal with difficult situations and to better understand particular facets of life. For instance, during the school year, a student who had quit school was hit by a truck and killed while she was walking along a highway not far from the school. A few students wrote about the death of this student when they were asked on their final exam to write about a situation that had occurred that year that had greatly influenced and/or changed them.

Other students in Mrs. Malone's class also used writing to help them deal with difficult situations and to better understand particular facets of life.

Sam noted in his essay that on the day he heard about Beth's death he had been feeling sorry for himself, believing that he "had it bad at home." He wrote, "I didn't think in a million years that anything like this would or even could happen to a girl I knew." He went on to write that "[i]t taught me that I didn't have life bad and that I shouldn't take it for granted because you never know when it might end."

Writing Workshop and Real-World Learning

Amber's and Sam's writing suggests that both students learned something about themselves, and this self-knowledge was possible because they "owned" their writing. Given this ownership, both students chose to write about their own situations, and, in doing so, were able to reflect on and analyze their experiences. Consequently, in addition to honing their writing skills through practice, Amber and Sam may also have discovered that writing can be a way of thinking through experience as well as a way of working toward solutions to problems.

What is the link between Amber's and Sam's pieces and John Dewey's philosophy? For Dewey, education is a means by which individuals can learn how to lead fulfilling and informed lives and thus to be productive members of society. He believed that one of the goals of education is to prepare children to be able to participate in the "social consciousness of the race" (Dewey, 1972, p. 84). But education can provide this training only when students are able to build their own interactions with the curriculum. In writing workshop this interaction with the curriculum occurs when students "own" their writing — when, for example, they engage in creating "personal projects."

As Amber and Sam begin to see writing as more than producing something, but also as a way of reflecting and gaining self-knowledge, they may extend their perceptions of writing to their lives outside school. As more reflective individuals with enriched views of writing, they may become more thoughtful members of society. In Dewey's terms, Amber and Sam are learning to join the "social consciousness of the race" because they may be learning that writing is the act of producing texts while rendering one's thoughts into language, thus making one's thinking clearer. Certainly, reflective, thoughtful individuals are important to society; thus, students in Mrs. Malone's writing workshop, while learning to be better writers, are also learning a skill which will help them participate more fully and productively in society.

Consequently, in addition to honing their writing skills through practice, Amber and Sam may also have discovered that writing can be a way of thinking through experience as well as a way of working toward solutions to problems.

While Sam and Amber were perhaps learning more about themselves as individuals by writing, they were probably also learning something about responsibility. Sam and Amber needed not only to produce a piece of writing, they also had to tap into their own interests and experiences for a topic, not necessarily an easy endeavor.

When building their own interactions with the curriculum, students may be more willing to put in the time and effort needed to produce quality writing. Students who learn the importance of time and understand the effort needed to produce something of quality are learning life lessons that will serve them both as students and as citizens.

Time Management and Self-Governed Learning

After students shared their plans for the day, Mrs. Malone, standing in the middle of the room, announced, "Let's have about 20 minutes of quiet writing time." Students began rifling through their folders, shuffling papers, searching for pens and pencils. The room became silent, except for occasional whispers, the sound of crinkling paper and the quiet voices of Mrs. Malone and students conferencing. I heard Mrs. Malone tell a student that his draft was "coming along nicely."

Students were at various stages of writing: some worked on first drafts; others appeared to be further along, while still others seemed to be in the throes of getting started. As I passed Ryan's desk, I noticed he had drawn a cluster on a sheet of paper, in the center of which he had written "story with a 4-wheeler."

Regardless of where they were in the process, students were being given an uninterrupted segment of time to work through their writing. Actually, Mrs. Malone and her students shared the management of time in writing workshop. Mrs. Malone managed time with regard to "quiet writing," and some other workshop routines. Students, on the other hand, also managed time, choosing, for example, how long to spend on pieces and deciding how much time to devote to prewriting and drafting. As a result of this, we see students' natural writing rhythms accommodated, with students proceeding at their own pace through the drafting process.

The manner by which time was managed in Mrs. Malone's writing workshop is as important as ownership from the perspective of Dewey's philosophy. Because

Writing Workshop and Real-World Learning

students were, to some degree, allowed to manage their own time, determining, for example, how long to spend on drafts, they were engaged in what Dewey calls a self-governed learning experience. Additionally, allowing students this autonomy meets another of Dewey's beliefs about education—that classrooms should attempt to create learning conditions that are similar to those from which students will learn outside of school. In the world outside of school, individuals manage their own time and in doing so learn to use this time responsibly. They learn, without teacher-imposed deadlines and numerous reminders, that certain tasks have to be completed within a particular time frame, that they must arrive at work promptly, that it may be best to tackle difficult jobs first, that procrastination is counterproductive. Finally, Dewey states that education should result from the empowerment of the individual in a social situation. Students in Mrs. Malone's writing workshop were empowered when they were allowed to manage their own time, and this empowerment allowed them to learn about their time needs as a writer and the importance of time for writing.

Because students were given the chance for a self-governed learning experience (using time as they chose), independent learning occurred. For one thing, the sustained periods of time that Mrs. Malone gave students helped them to learn on their own that good writing often takes a long time. This was not something that Mrs. Malone directly "taught," yet some students articulated this knowledge when asked what they had learned in writing workshop. For instance, one student wrote that "you need to rewrite many, many times" and that "it [writing] takes a long time." Another student wrote: "I learned how much time it [writing] takes." Yet another student responded that writing takes "time and a good imagination."

Student self-management of time in Mrs. Malone's writing workshop requires that students be self-directed, taking responsibility and making choices for themselves. Such self-direction within the classroom is important, for it allows students to appreciate for themselves the goals they are working for.

The sustained periods of quiet writing also contributed to students independently learning something about their writing processes and thus themselves as writers. For example, one student wrote on a questionnaire, "I just write as things come to me" and another that "I can go on and on about a topic."

Lofty (1992) notes that professional writers develop a personal rhythm as they write. Some writers even suggest that there is a "cyclic rhythm in the creative process" (p. 218). By allowing students to work through their writing at their own pace, Mrs. Malone helped students develop their own personal writing rhythms, knowledge that they can then use both in writing workshop and in other settings, both academic and nonacademic.

Student self-management of time in Mrs. Malone's writing workshop requires that students be self-directed, taking responsibility and making choices for themselves. Such self-direction within the classroom is important, for it allows students to appreciate for themselves the goals they are working for. For Dewey, allowing students self-direction helps them meaningfully engage in the pursuit of goals while helping them develop the "moral life," a component of which we might identify as a strong work ethic, which is, of course, an important life skill (Dewey, 1964, p. 131).

Response: Learning Social Cooperation

Mrs. Malone concluded the quiet writing time by announcing, "Let's stop for a few moments and share writing with one another." Students began moving around, settling in by the desks of peers, exchanging papers. While this sharing time took place, Mrs. Malone conferenced with students, asking questions like, "Can you explain how you got to the bottom of the mountain?"

Both the noise level and movement increased as students read, talked, responded, and wrote. A group of girls clustered around Ann's desk, reading over her shoulders as she continued to work on her story. Brian and Sam were reading one another's drafts; "Good ending," said Brian. Bill, chair tilted precariously backward, was reading to Kurt the lead from his piece about a hospital stay. Heath asked Ron if he would read his draft.

Mrs. Malone announced a five minute break. Students gathered by the windows and in the back of the room to talk. A handful of students

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continued to write at their desks, one or two approached Mrs. Malone for conferences, and a steady stream of students took the hall pass hanging by the door on their way to the rest rooms.

Sharing writing was clearly a vital element in Mrs. Malone's writing workshop, as students shared with the teacher in conferences as well as with classmates in peer groups. This sharing and response helped students improve their own writing while helping them develop life skills that they will use outside of school, now and in the future.

As an aid to better writing, it was apparent that conferences with Mrs. Malone and shared drafts with peers helped students learn about the importance of using details to engage readers. Further, by discussing their work with Mrs. Malone and with each other, these students developed and used a lexicon, or metalanguage, associated with writing. For instance, as students shared their drafts, they used words such as "lead," "edit," "revise," "conclusion," and "atmosphere." Interestingly, these were not terms that Mrs. Malone taught her students didactically. Rather, students internalized this metalanguage and came to use it naturally as a result of hearing the terms in conferences, eventually applying these words to their own writing and to their peers' writing.

The development of this metalanguage was also indicative of the social cooperation that was a vital component of Mrs. Malone's writing workshop and, therefore, points to another service that writing workshop has the potential to offer its participants. Because writing is, to varying degrees, an interactive endeavor, students shared their writing at different stages of development. The sharing that occurred, and which led to the development and use of a metalanguage, allowed students to develop in their writing workshop a community of writers all engaged in a similar pursuit. Because of this common goal, students cooperated with one another — sharing their writing, offering suggestions to peers, collaborating on some assignments. The type of social cooperation that necessarily occurred in writing workshop will no doubt be a part of students' lives outside of school. Serving on committees, collaborating in the workplace on projects, and cooperating in personal relationships all involve social exchange.

The social cooperation that occurred in Mrs. Malone's writing workshop is relevant to Dewey's views on social cooperation and what he calls cooperative classrooms. To Dewey, humans naturally wish to cooperate, possessing an inherent desire to contribute to collaborative endeavors. He also associates cooperative activity closely with democracy, maintaining that community is another name for democracy, for it presents to the members of a democratic society a chance to join on common projects, problems, and concerns. Dewey would consider the practice in social cooperation that occurs in writing workshop invaluable, not only for pragmatic purposes but also for more idealistic ones, such as enriching others through community.

While Dewey championed social cooperation, he also believed that the individual must develop personally and communally. In fact, he believed individual development could take place along side social cooperation. Dewey advocated rethinking the idea of individuality to accommodate the development of community. As the individual grows, learns, and develops, Dewey asserts that he or she is then able to better help others. For Dewey, social cooperation does not compromise individual growth; rather, the two work in tandem, resulting in personal and social benefits.

In Mrs. Malone's writing workshop, individual learning and growth occurred as students shared their drafts and as they responded to their peers' writing. This simultaneous personal and social development and learning was perhaps best described by a student who, when asked about the value of peer response, noted that she often learned something about her own writing, and how to revise and improve it, by helping peers revise and improve their writing.

Conclusion

In writing workshop, students not only have the opportunity to develop into proficient, confident writers, but they also have the chance to learn and develop life skills they can use to contribute to society. By building their own interactions with the curriculum, by engaging in self-governed learning experiences, and by interacting with peers in a community of learners, they are strengthening their self-confidence and ability to express themselves clearly to others.

Dewey's theory helps us understand the larger benefits of Mrs. Malone's writing workshop classroom. Her writing workshop illustrates that this forum presents students the opportunity to develop as writers, as individuals, and as members of a larger

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community. As students develop their proficiency with written language in the context and environment of writing workshop, they are concurrently developing skills that will facilitate their full and informed participation in society.

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Jo-Anne Kerr is a teacher consultant with the South Central Pennsylvania Writing Project. She teaches English at Ligonier Valley High School, Ligonier, PA.

25 Years of NWP

—continued from p. 7

tions that come with claims of premature knowing. For 25 years Jim Gray has been vigilant in warning the California Writing Project and sites of the National Writing Project against embracing any fashionable theory of learning or teaching or any instructional reform — however promising or supported by research and theory — which might foreclose on alternative approaches and other answers put forward by a successful classroom teacher.

Even those of us who are intellectually committed to the writing project and who have taken it upon ourselves to articulate a theory for the model and practices that define the writing project have found Jim indifferent or hostile to any theoretical label we might be inclined to propose as a way of identifying what approach the writing project takes to improving the teaching of writing in schools. From Jim Gray's perspective — and it is a perspective we must be reminded of whenever we are inclined to waver from it — no label or school of thought can be applied to the writing project, if it threatens to make the Project less hospitable to the ideas and experience of some successful teacher whose practice is inconsistent with the labeled principles. The writing project has therefore assiduously refused to embrace such attractive and widely respected movements or pedagogical stances as constructivism or whole language, or critical pedagogy, or literature-based instruction. We must not become proponents of any of these, Jim would insist, if that might suggest that we are not open to whatever might represent its opposite and might be brought into our community by an experienced and thoughtful classroom teacher. For Jim Gray and those of us who remain faithful to the writing project model, the Project remains aggressively agnostic with respect to any approach that may be offered for school reform or instructional improvement, and yet militantly orthodox in its faith, first, in the capacity of teachers to continue learning from their own experience and from the wisdom of peers and, then, in the ultimate authority of teachers to determine for themselves what works and doesn't work in their own classrooms.

Fortunately, Jim has not allowed his retirement to remove him from the discourse of our community and he resides near at hand to advise and chastise us as we continue to define and refine the work of the writing project. He serves as a mentor to all of us, and we who have been privileged to work with Jim as site directors and Fellows of CWP sites remain, in our best professional moments, his protégés.

Sheridan Blau directs the South Coast W.P.

Learning by Heart: Contemporary American Poetry about School

MAGGIE ANDERSON AND DAVID HASSLER (EDS.)
Iowa City: U. of Iowa Press, 1999. $29.95 hardcover; $14.95 soft; 246 pages

REVIEWED BY NICHOLAS COLES

What kind of a place is school? What do teaching and learning feel like to those who are engaged, or disengaged, in it? And what happens in and around schools besides teaching and learning? *Learning by Heart* suggests what contemporary poets might have to say about the same questions that occupy writers on school reform. As good poems often do, those collected here offer striking images, distinct voices, odd angles of vision, insights inaccessible in even the best school-reform literature, let alone Ed. School textbooks. What we get from these poems — by about 100 poets including Rita Dove, Kenneth Koch, Maxine Kumin, Audre Lord, Philip Levine, Sonya Sanchez, William Stafford, and James Wright — is a closer reading of particular moments in the experience of students, mostly, but also of teachers. With it comes a vivid sense of the consequences, for individual minds, bodies and spirits, of the way schools and classrooms operate.

In some ways these images of school are depressingly familiar, as the title suggests. Much of schooling, it seems, is still a matter of learning by rote, committing material to memory in order to give it back to the teacher. More often than not, schools appear here as places of control, of "unquestioning compliance with rules and mandates and arbitrary customs," in the words of Robert Coles's eloquent foreword. Accordingly, teachers figure too often as keepers of various kinds of order: drill sergeants, grammar ladies, guardians of the right answer. We even meet a few of the spinsterly schoolmarms of stereotype, invigilating spelling bees.

As teachers, on the evidence of these poems, we leave deep marks. The things we say to students — especially the hurtful things — stay with them: "*'Judy is not a good leader,'* is all Mrs. Lawrence says … I hear her every time I fail," writes Judy Page Heitzman ("The Schoolroom on the Second Floor of the Knitting Mill"). As students, too, we sometimes make our marks, whether they are heeded or not. In Rosemary Catacalos's wonderful poem, "David Talamantez on the Last Day of Second Grade," David, a designated slow learner, runs from the school scattering the year's accumulated papers, scored with the marks of his failings: "On every single page David Talamantez has crossed out the teacher's red numbers / and written in giant letters, blue ink, *Yes! David. Yes!*"

Many of these poems demonstrate alternatives to mechanical instruction, discipline by shame, and what Thomas Centolella calls "slow death by boredom"…

But the title, *Learning by Heart*, is, of course, ambiguous, and many of these poems demonstrate alternatives to mechanical instruction, discipline by shame, and what Thomas Centolella calls "slow death by boredom" ("Ode"). They celebrate the possibility of learning by passion, discovering one's talents, coming alive, starting to care about others and pay attention to the world, to language, to the possibilities of the future. We meet several teachers who love language or science or history and communicate their passion, as well as teachers who just seem to enjoy kids as an interesting and divergent life-form. Sharon Olds, for example, writes of "Mrs. Krikorian":

She saved me. When I arrived in sixth grade,
a known criminal, the new teacher
asked me to stay after school the first day, she said
I've heard about you. She was a tall woman,
with a deep crevice between her breasts,
and a large, calm nose. She said,
This is a special library pass.
As soon as you finish your hour's work—
that hour's work that took ten minutes
and then the devil glanced into the room
and found me empty, a house standing open—
you can go to the library.

Even the grammar ladies sometimes leave a positive mark, like Greg Williamson's teacher, Mrs. Duke:

… Daily on the wall's clean slate,
She wrote the language he would learn to live
With: words and rules and examples of the rules
Whereby nouns adverbly verb their objects,
So that he might call things as he saw them.

She gave him, in other words, the tools for his poetry.

Review: Learning by Heart

In fact, these poems reveal as much about the sensibilities of contemporary American poets as they do about teachers and schools. (Ninety percent of the poets included here have worked as poets-in-the-schools — that is, as visiting artists — and only a handful of full-time teachers are represented.) Again and again one encounters the poet's habitual sense of his or her special difference as a student, and this provides a particular slant to their reading of school experiences. The future poets were the ones who privately knew better than their teachers. Their learning, they seem to claim, was rarely an intended consequence of the teaching they encountered. They were smartasses or losers, defying the regime of school, or just biding time and hiding out. Paul Zimmer's ironic shame at being a mess in school turns into a badge of pride:

Even now
When I hide behind elaborate masks
It is always known that I am Zimmer,
The one who does the messy papers
And fractures all his crayons,
Who spits upon the radiators
And sits all day in shame
Outside the office of the principal.
("Zimmer in Grade School")

Maggie Anderson and David Hassler have done a fine job of editing *Learning by Heart*. They have selected strong poems by many of our best contemporary writers, and their thematic arrangement into sections is intelligent and revealing. Under each section title — *Homeroom, Language Lessons, A History of Our People, Recess, Sports and Clubs, After School, O Where Are They Now?* — the gathered poems both expand and complicate the traditional school meanings of these terms. *Homeroom*, for example, which is often portrayed as a place where a teacher nurtures students, or watches for the ones who are abused, is also where dreaming is not allowed, and rulers discipline knuckles. *Recess* encompasses not only freedom from classroom confinement, but also the dangers of the playground, the cruelties of bullies, and the pressures of sex.

For a relatively brief anthology (135 poems), the editors have included a particularly rich array of minority voices, many of them strongly critical of the schooling they received. (Real learning, it seems, came later.) Cornelius Eady writes,

We were born to be gray. We went to school,
Sat in rows, ate white bread,
Looked at the floor a lot. In the back
Of our small heads
A long scream.
("The Supremes")

In Martin Espada's "Public School 190, Brooklyn 1963," "the inkwells had no ink" and you learned you were part of "something bad." Li-Young Lee gets slapped and stood in the corner "for not knowing the difference / between *persimmon* and *precision*" (while his teacher has no clue of the uses his Asian family has for persimmons). For Toi Derricotte, Catholic school was a place in which "we conserved light by walking in darkness" ("St. Peter Claver"). For Nez Perce poet Phil George, the classroom was where you lost your identity:

That teacher gave me a new name ... again.
She never even had feasts or a giveaway!
Still I do not know what "George" means;
And now she calls me "Philip."
TWO FLOCKS OF GEESE LIGHTING UPON STILL WATERS
must be a name too hard to remember.
("Name Giveaway")

The poems in this diverse collection invite us to remember what classroom life was for us, to consider the marks made on our identities and futures by our experiences in and around school. Robert Coles lists many of these common experiences, borrowing titles of poems to form the following sentence:

> *We all have been "beginners," have struggled with "spelling" and with "penmanship," have known afterward the "nostalgia" that goes with remembering a school building, have yearned for (or feared) "recess," have taken rides on "school buses," have heard the teacher say, "the thing you must remember," have gone to our "first practice," have waited and waited for that time called "lunch," have known "cruel boys" and "sunny days" and a "bully" and seen "cheerleaders" and listened to "the high school band" and gone to "the junior high dance" and later on (as with me just now) experienced "gratitude to old teachers"*
> ...

And the list could be extended: "Taking My Son to School," "Zimmer's Head Thudding against the Blackboard," "Two-Room Schoolhouse," "The Teacher Said," "Raising Their Hands," "Learning in the First Grade," "Spanish Lessons," "Fears of the Eighth Grade," "The Nuns of Childhood," and so on.

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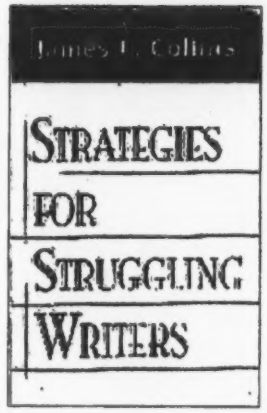
Strategies for Struggling Writers

JAMES L. COLLINS
New York: The Guilford Press, 1998. $44.95 hardcover, $24.95 soft; 244 pages

REVIEWED BY MARY LANDIS HUTCHINSON



As it is with many teachers of writing that I know, I am drawn to the titles of books, particularly the practical ones that I think will help me improve myself as an educator and a human being. It may reveal my shallow side, but for me, title is everything, which explains why I gravitated toward *Strategies for Struggling Writers* by James L. Collins. The opportunity to increase my repertoire of tactics for teaching writing, particularly with the students for whom writing is a chore, was strong and inviting. Indeed, had the title omitted the word "strategies," I would have most likely relegated it to the bottom half of my reading pile. Instead, I opened it with the anticipation of learning something new, or at least of gaining a greater appreciation for what I already do right. In Collins' book, I felt I got a little of both.

He believes that the recent shift to a writing workshop approach in the classroom has not helped struggling writers because they lack the primary foundation that would allow them to take advantage of this learning environment.

Collins begins his 244 pages with a cursory review of writing instruction, tracing the change of emphasis from the teaching of skills to process-based instructional methods. He believes that the recent shift to a writing workshop approach in the classroom has not helped struggling writers because they lack the primary foundation that would allow them to take advantage of this learning environment. In fact, Collins thinks that the process model, with its belief in pulling latent writing abilities out of students, assumes that writing is an acquired proficiency rather than a learned one, and that for struggling writers this is a problem. The way to help these students in a workshop atmosphere is through "strategic writing instruction," a term coined by Collins to describe a method for allowing teachers "to think strategically about writing and the teaching of writing so that they can help writers identify and use strategies to control their own writing skills and writing processes" (p. viii). Success for struggling writers, Collins asserts, depends on instructional intervention. What is important in this methodology, and what Collins stresses throughout the book, is that teachers work with students to tap into what they already know and then help students to "co-construct" an understanding of writing through their participation in community with other writers. This subtle yet striking difference in the way teachers work with struggling writers is what makes strategic writing instruction a success. It is not a formulaic structure which gives students strategies to help them develop, but rather it is a building process which allows teachers to individualize instruction in order to help these writers make their own connections. Certainly, the examples used throughout the book illustrate what can be achieved when teachers rely on their own understanding of writing and students, rather than depend on workbooks or an instructor's manual.

It is obvious that Collins has spent a great deal of time thinking about struggling writers. Through his research he has discovered that these students, often labeled as lazy or weak writers, have "the same difficulties as the rest of us when we are faced with challenging writing tasks; the only major differences are that they encounter difficulties more often and have fewer options for overcoming them" (p. 132). According to Collins, struggling writers tend to rely on a series of default strategies that keep them from growing and developing their writing skills. In fact, Collins devotes an entire chapter to three main default strategies—copying, visualizing, and narrating—that struggling writers use consistently, and he provides a way through strategic writing instruction to build on, not replace, these methods in order to help students progress. Basically, this approach involves four steps: "1) identifying a strategy worth teaching, 2)

Review: Strategies for Struggling Writers

introducing the strategy by modeling it, 3) helping students to try the strategy out with workshop-style teacher guidance, and 4) helping students work toward independent mastery of the strategy through repeated practice and reinforcement" (p. 65). Therefore, the role of the teacher throughout this process is to help students discover what works for them. The key is to reach the students in such a way that they begin to develop other options rather than continue to rely on default strategies that keep them stuck.

Reading this book I found myself nodding in affirmation. The theoretical framework Collins presents makes sense, particularly for many teachers like myself who are immersed daily in researching and understanding writing theory and practice. In fact, it seems obvious that teachers who are researchers in their own classrooms know how to help struggling writers; it is inherent in their nature to act as coach, guide, and "co-constructor." The problem appears to be with teachers who have only a basic understanding of process writing and feel that the best way to teach writing is through formulaic strategies that they have gleaned from other sources. This is where Collins' book can be most helpful. Inexperienced teachers will come to understand what struggling writers go through and how they might intervene to help them find appropriate ways of learning. Experienced teachers, the ones who have spent and will continue to spend a great deal of time thinking about students and means for connecting with them, will benefit from this book as well by discovering additional ideas for tapping into how struggling writers see and understand language. However, both novice and veteran teachers of writing will find that the book does not present an inventory of strategies for intervention, even though this is implied in the title. Rather Collins states in his closing chapter, "Identifying strategies — beyond those that I've used to illustrate my main points — I leave to my readers" (p. 213).

Mary Landis Hutchinson is director of the Lehigh Valley Writing Project at Penn State University in Fogelsville, Pennsylvania.

Review: Learning by Heart

—continued from p. 34

By inviting us to remember our own and to envision others' experiences of school, *Learning by Heart* also provokes us to imagine how school might be different. The editors intend that the book will find its way into schools and especially into teacher preparation classes. I hope it does. If poems can be an instrument for what Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh calls "deep looking," shouldn't they be more a part of the curriculum than they are now? For the same reason, could poetry not also be a form of teacher inquiry, combining as it does close observation and the shaping power of language? As William Carlos Williams told Robert Coles when they visited New Jersey schools where Dr. Williams was the physician, "There's a poem a minute taking place in those classrooms." If so, teachers should be writing more of them.

Nicholas Coles (no relation of Robert, unfortunately) teaches at the University of Pittsburgh and is director of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project. He is the coeditor of two books of contemporary poems about work and working-class life, Working Classics *and* For a Living *(University of Illinois Press).*

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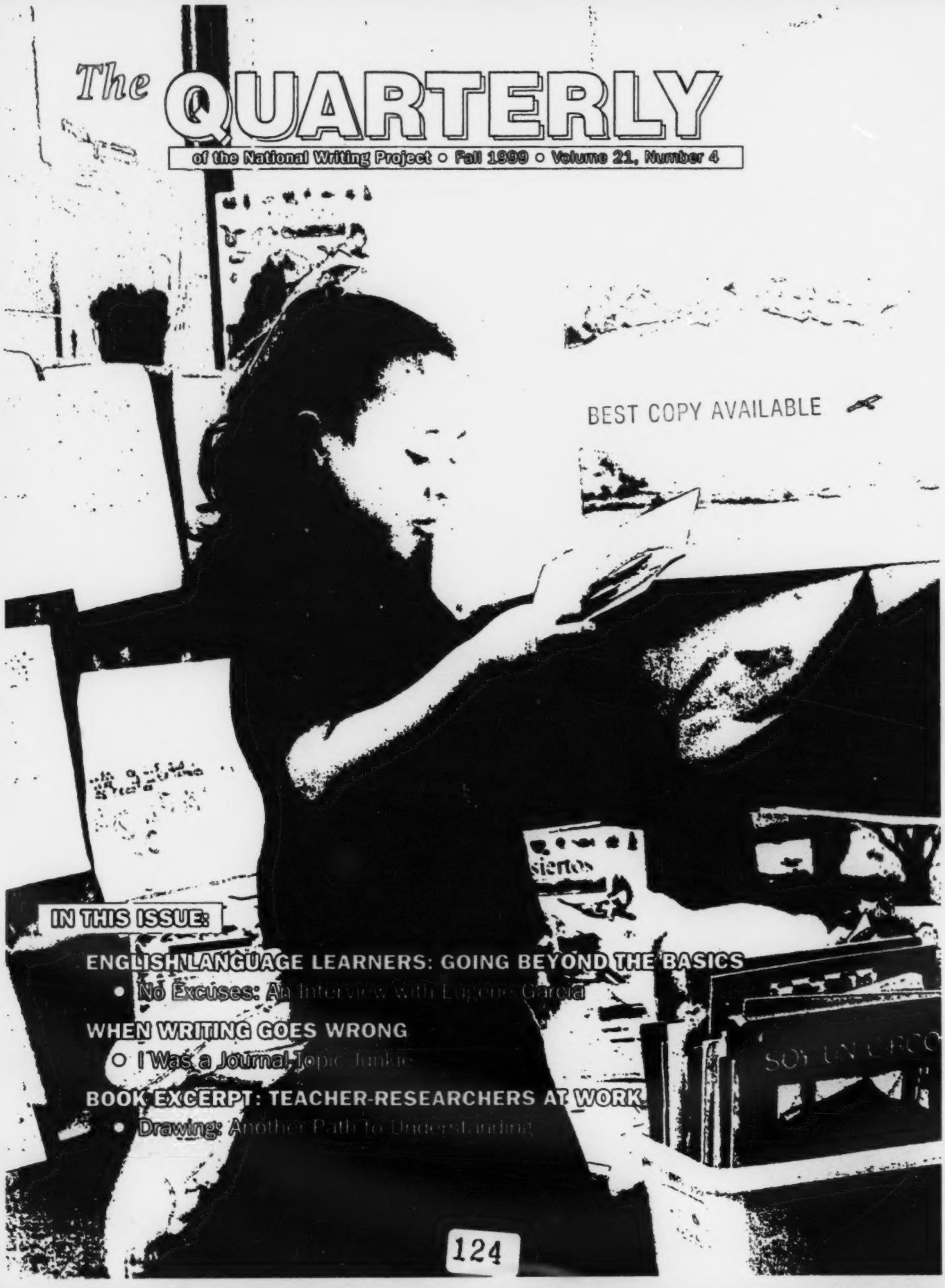

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Cover photo and photos on pages 17 and 20 by Elizabeth Crews. Uncaptioned photos are representative of the ideas and not the particular individuals described in the accompanying articles.

Puny Poetry Meets Its Match

BY GERRI RUCKEL AND JIM HORRELL

Puny Boy
Puny boy is puny,
He looks just like George Clooney,
He's yeller and green
if you know what I mean
Puny boy is looney and oh so puny
He gets bugged by the goonies
And they are all so puny
and they'll beat him up soonie
– Zeke Wozak

It seems that when it comes to poetry, writing students decide to take the plunge when they don't know what else to write or there's some sort of deadline approaching. Then it's time to produce, as quickly as possible, a short, silly rhyming poem devoid of meaning.

Zeke, a new student to our school, came from Israel by way of a public school in nearby Philadelphia. He had plenty of things to write about. He had fond memories of a favorite teacher from that school, while, at the same time, he harbored feelings of academic inadequacy. He had many additional real topics to explore in his writing, including: new school, new home, new friends, fears of not fitting in, and the experience of having lived in another country. Why, then, did he refuse the opportunity to write about any of those things? Instead, he chose to write "Puny Boy." Why?

Consider Bill. Bill is a very intelligent young man who seemed bent on proving to his classmates that he was clever. He has many interests, including baseball, HTML programing, and world affairs, since his father works for the military. Bill unveiled his poetry prowess with this little ditty about our class mascot, Bubba the giant plush green frog:

Bubba In Da Tubba
Bubba's in da tubba.
He needs a good rubba.

He's really awfully sad.
He broke his lily pad.

He needs a bite to eat.
He needs something sweet.

Morris Moose came over to say hi.
He brought a cherry pie.

He also sang a song.
It took him rather long.

It's not very dark.
So they went to the park.

Morris Moose fell in the lake.
He was eaten by a snake.
– Bill Heinz

When conferencing with students about poems like this, it can be hard to know where to start. Equally difficult is the challenge of trying to figure out what you'd like the outcome of the conference to be. Bill's conference went something like this:

"Bill, I see you've written a poem here," the teacher says. "Tell me about it."

Bill smiles. "It's about Bubba. He smells bad."

"So you're telling me that Bubba, the plush frog, smells bad. I see."

"Yeah. So I figured he could use a bath."

"Hence, 'Bubba in Da Tubba'?"

"Yeah."

"He looks hungry to you?"

"Well, I needed it to rhyme."

"So, where did Morris, the equally plush moose, come in?"

"Well, he brought the cherry pie."

"Uh huh. What is it that you really want to say about all of this? Bubba is important to you as our class mascot? You enjoy seeing him every morning? You remember winning him in the magazine drive contest? How you were the number one seller of magazines in the whole school?"

"No. I just thought it was funny."

"So, you're happy with 'Bubba In Da Tubba' as is?"

"Yeah."

Root canal is a simple, painless process compared to cajoling these students to rewrite or revise these pieces. To them, the poem is done and no amount of educated teacher prodding is going to make a difference. We began wondering why we were pushing students to revise. Whatever it was they were trying to say, they said. There is no meaning, no message, nothing expressed here beyond simple word play.

But what about those times students had real feelings to express and no other poetry voice to use?

When Jeff, a classmate, died suddenly in a freak accident at home, Ken worked secretly on this poem for a month. Ken was a new

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student and Jeff had taken him under his wing. They shared many interests such as skateboarding, music and clothes. Ken intended to write a tribute to his friend.

Jeff
Jeff loved to skate
And even stay up late
Jeff loved to surf
And even mark his turf
Jeff loved to play soccer
And was a very good blocker
Jeff loved to roller blade
And even make a card trade
Jeff made me a friend
And even let me lend
Jeff made me a part of the school
And was very cool
Jeff always made me laugh
And lead me through the path
Jeff was very strong
And even read along
Jeff liked to do stunts
And liked those candy runts
Jeff liked biking
And even did some hiking
Jeff loved to do things with his dad
And this was very sad
– Ken Wood

There was a poetry itch that Ken really needed to scratch, and he was frustrated at not being able to say what he needed to say. During his writing process, Ken had been advised that he might be better able to express his thoughts about Jeff and his death if he didn't worry about rhyming. In the end, after several revisions, Ken felt like he had worked long enough on this piece and was satisfied with this poem. He said, "It's good. I like it. It rhymes." He was unable to get away from the idea that poetry had to rhyme.

Ken and everyone else had read Seuss, Moss, Prelutsky and Silverstein and each had formed a file in his mind called, "This is Poetry," where rhyming and language play rule. Any linguistic ambiguity could be cleared up with an accompanying illustration. Unfortunately for Ken, there was no illustration to make his message clear. As Donald Graves, in *A Fresh Look at Writing*, put it:

> *At first, children are often caught up in the 'form' of poetry. This is especially true of children who insist on rhyming. Unfortunately, the form of the poem, the straining for rhyme, can push meaning to the sidelines.*(p. 335)

Ken was not alone in this poetry wasteland, not by a long shot. What was going wrong? As writing fellows of the Pennsylvania Writing and Literature Project (PAWLP), we decided it was our duty to move our student writers beyond puny poetry. In writers' workshop, we shifted all focus onto poetry. Our new poetry unit was supposed to go very smoothly, a slick combination of strategies gleaned from two different PAWLP summer writing institutes. It was time to get out the shovels and dig through the writing gurus.

We wanted to inspire our students. Georgia Heard said, "Every writer of poetry is first a reader of poetry" (p.1). Following Heard's suggestion, we placed all kinds of poetry books in the classroom. We cleaned the library out of all the old forlorn books of poetry that hadn't been checked out in years. We raided our closets and bookshelves and we encouraged our students to do the same. The children were given several class periods to pour over the poetry anthologies, selecting and sharing their favorites. Ultimately they copied their favorite selections into their writers' notebooks.

We decided to follow Heard's suggestion to hang poetry all around the school. Suddenly our students were eager to locate and recopy the perfect microscope poem to decorate the science teacher's door. The enthusiasm began to spread, and students began searching for poems at home as well as at school. Poetry about windows appeared on the glass in the hallways. Even the cafeteria and bathrooms weren't safe. The principal's well-known distaste for cats prompted the students to blanket his office with cat poetry.

There were only so many poems about cats in all of our collected anthologies, so the students pitched in, adding some original cat poetry. Polly, eager to please, created "Three Fat Cats" to add to the collection. It illustrated how far we still had to go.

Three Fat Cats
three fat cats wobbling & balancing on
a high sky wire
juggling & jumping higher & higher
the first fat cat with a bat
went & crashed into
another fat cat
when wham bam
down went those fat cats.
fat cat three said, "Hey what about me?"
Three fat cats moaning & groaning
but when they were done they were
very mad at fat cat one
–Polly Lockwood

The students were enjoying poetry. They were developing a sense of which poetry

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they liked and which they didn't. Bill loved Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven" so much that he committed it to memory. It was fun to get him started by saying aloud in the hallway, "As I wandered, weak and weary..." He said, "I never knew poetry could be so neat and spooky."

Some students collected their favorite poems in special notebooks which they carried everywhere. Knowing only the first line of a poem, one student persisted in trying to locate the rest of the poem. Eventually, the eighth grade English teacher came through with the rest of "Sea Fever." Another student, Maria, noted, "I thought poems were just about flowers. It's cool that they can be about everyday things."

The expression, "Maybe dats youwr pwoblem" became heavily used throughout the sixth grade after introducing the poem, "Maybe Dats Youwr Pwoblem Too" by Jim Hall.

MAYBE DATS YOUWR PWOBLEM TOO
All my pwoblems
who knows, maybe evwybody's pwoblems
is due to da fact, due to da awful twuth
dat I am SPIDERMAN

I know, I know. All da dumb jokes:
No flies on you, ha ha,
and da ones about what do I do wit all
doze extwa legs in bed. Well, dat's funny yeah.
But you twy being
SPIDERMAN for a month or two. Go ahead.

You get doze cwazy calls fwom da
Gubbener askin you to twap some booglar who's
only twying to wip off color TV sets.
Now, what do I cawre about TV sets?
But I pull on da suit, da stinkin suit,
wit da sucker cups on da fingers,
and get my wopes and wittle bundle of
equipment and den I go flying like cwazy
acwoss da town fwom woof top to woof top.
Till der he is, some poor dumb color TV slob
and I fall on him and we westle a widdle
until I get him all woped. So big deal.

You tink when you SPIDERMAN
der's sometin big going to happen to you.
Well, I tell you what. It don't happen dat way.

Nuttin happens. Gubbener calls, I go.
Bwing him to pwice. Gubbener calls again,
like dat over and over.

I tink I twy sometin diffunt. I tink I twy
sometin excitin like wacing cawrs. Sometin to make
my heart beat at a difwent wate.
But den you just can't quit being sometin like
SPIDERMAN.
You SPIDERMAN for life. Fowever. I can't even
buin my suit. It won't buin. It's fwame wesistent.
So maybe dat's youwr pwoblem too, who knows.
So maybe dat's da whole pwoblem wif evwytin.
Nobody can buin der suits, day all fwame wesistent.
Who knows?

Each student's "This is Poetry" file was expanding, filling up with many different styles and types of poetry. Randy Bomer in *Time for Meaning* calls this "creating a sense of genre." We couldn't wait to see how their original poetry would show this growth. We realized, however, that this wouldn't be enough, by itself, to strengthen puny poetry. They were developing an appreciation for poetry, but there was no transfer into their writing. Maybe dat was the pwoblem. It was unrealistic to expect the kids to grow in poetic voice by merely reading, selecting, and sharing poems. We were only building to that moment. As Graves said, "Children need to hear the voices of many poets when they are writing poetry, to discover how they shape words and sounds to meaning." (p. 337)

We asked the students to examine some of their newfound favorite poetry and ask themselves, "What did the writer do to help me understand and enjoy this poem?" Now that there was a heightened awareness of writer's craft, we began, as Nancie Atwell would say, "to tease out" the elements of poetry. These included: line breaks, organization, use of white space, sensory images, figurative language, rhyming, alliteration, repetition, word choice, rhythm, and descriptive detail.

Then, the words of Ralph Fletcher from *What A Writer Needs* (1993) surfaced:

> *It turns out that many writers actually discover what they have to say in the process of writing it. The writer's challenge is to keep this sense of discovery intact; this keeps writing fresh and vibrant."* (p.21)

Fletcher also recounts a tale that illustrates this concept beautifully:

> *A little girl watches a sculptor at work. He begins carving into a large wooden cube and works hard all day. By late afternoon, the shape of a lion has begun to emerge. Absolutely dumb-founded, the little girl looks at the sculptor and sputters, 'But how did you know there was a lion inside that wood?'* (p. 23)

So, our next step was clear. It was time to write.

Maybe all of the yucky — for lack of a better word — poetry the writers had been

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churning out had a purpose after all. Perhaps it was just their way of trying to find that lion.

In this fairly typical piece of puny poetry, Katie tries to recount her memory of a recent day at the beach. Through the sometimes forced rhyme, some sensory images and personification stand out. Perhaps this piece is not an emerging lion, but certainly something worthwhile is emerging.

The Beach
The wind brushes my hair
A kite flies in the air
The water is cold
Hot sand I hold
The sun goes down
Without a sound
The sun is down, so
We have to go

Like May Belle in the Katherine Paterson novel, the students needed a *Bridge to Terabithia.* In order to be able to apply what they were being taught, students needed to be ready to learn it. According to Lev Vygotsky, some tasks are too difficult for students, even when clearly explained. He goes on to say in his theory of the "zone of proximal development" that while learning there are times when "the child cannot solve a problem alone but can be successful under adult guidance or in collaboration with a more advanced peer." Jerome Bruner called it scaffolding. Scaffolding is where a teacher provides the needed support by supplying "clues, reminders, encouragement, breaking the problem down into steps, providing an example, or anything else that allows the student to grow in independence as a learner." Our student writers needed help taking the first steps into writing meaningful poetry.

Poet Julia Blumenreich, a presenter at the 1998 PAWLP summer institute in Buck's County, offered us our first step, an approach she called "parallel poetry." Students write parallel poetry by imitating the form of a published poem. She also emphasized the importance of working on whole-class or large-group poems of this type before turning kids loose to try it on their own.

After consulting Kenneth Koch's *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?* (1973), it seemed that William Carlos Williams' poetry would provide the perfect stepping stone. His poems are simple; they are about ordinary things, and they're short. It's entry-level meaningful poetry.

Williams' "This Is Just to Say" was the first poem in Koch's collection, and it became our first model:

This Is Just to Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold
– William Carlos Williams

We read aloud to the students, then each was given a copy for examination. Next, each accepted the challenge of writing "parallel poems." Parallel poems borrow the pattern and spirit of the original poem, but the students supply their own words and ideas. We wrote several group poems of this type, then each student set off on her own.

This poem was a great jumping off point because it gives an insincere apology for doing something deliciously wrong. The students delighted in writing this kind of poem.

This Is Just To Say
This is just to say
I have flooded the school
And gone scuba diving through the halls.
If I say I'm sorry you won't believe me;
Besides, I have always dreamed of doing it.
– Craig Lewin

This Is Just To Say
This is just to say
I have eaten your dog's food,
I am sorry
It tasted different,
So crunchy and hard.
– Ryan Young

Many students enjoyed "confessing" to not doing homework, wearing older siblings' clothes, taking things without asking, and eating food that wasn't theirs. This was a totally new experience in writing poetry for the students. Many enjoyed expressing themselves in this manner.

Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" provided a similar opportunity for some more poetry baby steps.

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The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

– William Carlos Williams

Natasha used her parallel poem here to poke fun at Williams' original. While she closely follows the form, she clearly makes her feelings known when it comes to "The Red Wheelbarrow". For our students, this represents another new use of poetry, and, a baby step toward parody.

Mental Hospital

So much depends
Upon

Being able to
write

And not selling
stuff

You wrote during
your

Stay in a mental
hospital

– Natasha Simonova

In this parallel poem, Elizabeth shuns the form of the Williams poem, but keeps the red wheelbarrow.

Silence Broken

In
the
silence
of
the
night
I
slept
A
red
wheelbarrow
fell
through
the
ceiling
I
slept
no
more.

– Elizabeth Robinson

It should be noted here, Elizabeth was delighted with her ending, "I slept no more." She also felt that she perfectly mimicked what she felt was a surprise appearance of chickens in the original by having the red wheelbarrow crash through her bedroom ceiling.

We then arrived at Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." We read the poem, noted poetic devices, discussed interpretations, placed a copy in our notebooks and bathed in the beauty of the words.

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

– Robert Frost

At first, Frost's masterpiece suffered the same treatment as Williams' works as the students wrestled with another new piece to parallel.

The Idea Not Taken

Two ideas converged inside my head
I'm sorry I don't know which one to take
As a writer there I thought
And thought for as long as I could
To see so many ideas light up in my head
So I thought and thought

And perhaps choosing the better idea
Since it sounded easier to write

I am telling this with disappointment
Tons and tons of thought wasted
I chose the easy way out
And that has made all the difference!

– Caitlin Cahill

A pair of students saw a different kind of parallel between Frost's poem and a book they had recently read.

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Harry Potter
Two worlds converged at one train station
And sorry I could not live in them both
And being one person, long I stood
As I looked between platform 9 and 10
I could not see platform 9 and 3/4

Then the other I could see so clear
Which in I was hated by the Dursleys
Because Dudley was a spoiled brat
I shall start a new life in the wizard world

And that very first day I belonged to Gryffindor

In happiness I was with my pal Ron
Oh, I am scared of Snape
Yet knowing he dislikes me
I doubted if I shall stay

I shall be telling this with a potion
Sometime when I'm a ghost
Two worlds converged in my mind
In the wizard world I am a hero
And that has made all the difference.
– Jason Borowsky and Sarah Binder

While not perfect in convention, this piece demonstrated that not only were the students able to mimic the pattern of a poem, but they could build in some sort of personal meaning. We knew we were on the right track. It was clear that lurking beneath the surface were some real topics and issues to explore.

The Friend Not Taken

Two friends diverged in my mind,
And sorry I could not be friends with them both
And being one person, not two
And I looked at them both finding their special qualities.
So I thought just as fair
And having perhaps choosing the wrong one
Because of my choice, they would never forgive me.

I shall choose with a sigh
Friendship and memories with this person
Two friends diverged in my mind
I took neither one, I'll be on my own
And that has made all the difference.
– Sarah Binder

Taking the next step, students wrote parallel poetry based on "Five Versions of the Icicle," by Nancy Willard.

The Five Versions of the Icicle

They are sun's wet nurse, said the mother,
and it milks them to nothing.

They are stockings, said the laundress,
and grievously shrunken.

They are noodles in a broth of diamonds, said the cook,
and they are sausages oiled with light.

They are the parsnips of heaven, said the gardener,
that cannot be grown out of season.

They are the urns of grief, said the widow.
They live on their own tears.

This poem forces students to experiment with perspective. While the pattern of the poem is simple, expressing a number of perspectives concerning a single object requires the students to do some linguistic and mental gymnastics. We dared the students to rise to the challenge.

Water: From Five Different Perspectives

It is what nurtures my crops,
said the farmer,
to help them grow so I can sell.

It is what quenches my thirst,
said the aerobics teacher,
to cool me down after a hard workout.

It is my home,
said the fish,
to live and swim in.

It is my hobby,
said the swimmer,
to have fun splashing in it.

It is the dangerous tide,
said the beach's lifeguard,
to become stronger than and overcome everything else.
–Maria Tagle

Maria's piece illustrates a clear understanding of perspective and the form of the original "Five Versions" poem. Adam, in his piece, used the form to express his adolescent angst.

Five Versions of Nothing

It is what I see, said the blind man,
black, just black

It is what I hear, signaled the deaf man,
blank and cold

It is what comes out of my mouth,
signaled the dumb man,
just breathing my mouth is for

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It is what I remember, said the lady
with Alzheimers disease,
holes in my memory

It is what I am, said the man with no
hopes, no future, no goals, and no
motivation,

No one Nobody Nothing
– Adam Gitzes

Writing parallel poetry is, we found, a valuable exercise. However, it was time for our student writers to begin to strike out on their own. We knew, however, they still were in need of some guidance. In an effort to provide needed structure in a more open-ended format, we worked with some poetry we called "template poetry." In template poetry, students are given a series of line starters and are asked to fill in the rest of the lines. The result is close to an original poem, with the obvious exception of the line starters.

One example of this, picked up in a sharing session in the 1998 PAWLP Fall follow-up class, was an "I Am" Poem. We provided the first few words of each line.

I Am Poem (Template)

I am (describe yourself as you dream
or as you wish you could be)
I wonder...
I hear...
I see...
I want...
I am (repeat – same as above...I am)
I pretend...
I feel...
I touch...
I fear...
I cry when...
I am... (repeat)
I understand...
I say...
I dream...
I try to...
I hope...
I am (repeat)

After guiding the students through this once as a group, the students were asked to fill out this template on their own. We all were surprised by some of the results.

I Am

I am who you want me to be
I wonder what kind of person you'll
make me be
I fear you'll make me a nobody
I cry when I don't know what I'll be
tomorrow
I am who you want me to be
I understand I might be crazy
I say I don't know who I am
I dream I am a famous person
I try to think I'm not strange
I hope I'm not insane
I am who you want me to be
I hear what you say about who I am
I see you talking about who I am
I want not to be dull
I am who you want me to be
I pretend I am energetic
I feel nothing
I touch nothing
I am who you want me to be
– Edward Appelbaum

I Am All That I Can Be

I am all that I can be
I wonder why I always try to be like others
I hear voices saying that I can be better
I see others that I feel are much more sophisticated
and more mature than me
I want more to say to me "I like your shirt," instead
of saying, "I did better than you!"
I am all that I can be
I pretend that I am someone or something other
than myself
I feel depression and that I could've done better
I touch pictures of things that I'm not and wish to
myself that I am what's on the picture
I fear that if I do change I'll want to change back
I cry when I stare in the mirror and picture
something other than my face
I am all that I can be
I understand that I can't get everyone that I want
and that life is dependent on choices
I say to myself that I can make my own choices
I dream that I am famous and everyone had a
great time with me by their sides
I try to tell myself that I can get better, but I always
end up saying, "Stop trying, it's too late!"
I hope that everyone can understand and say that
"I am all that I can be"
– Courtney Goldstein

Both Edward and Courtney were surprised by the power and revealing nature of their template poems. Both were struggling with a sense of insecurity, yet both volunteered to share these with their classmates. This served to raise the bar for the others. One student after a pregnant pause, simply sighed, "Wow!"

Another type of template focused on nostalgic memories. We called it a "That Was..." poem. This template encouraged students to draw on meaningful memories to convey the circumstances as well as the essence of that time. Memories of several teachers and the deeds that touched her heart joined to form Kathleen's poem "That

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Was My Teacher." See if you can find the template.

That Was My Teacher
Have you ever met my teacher?
Sure you have.
Remember that time
When you got a hundred on your test
Or when you got a fifty
And you cried on your desk?
Remember how she handed you a tissue
And the retest
That was my teacher.

Remember that time
When you got in a fight with your friends
And you sat alone at lunch
And you didn't talk to anyone
And when she found out
You sat in the corner of the room talking to her,
The quietness of her voice?
Remember how she helped you and your friend get back together
All joyful and relieved
That was my teacher.

Remember that time
When you were trying to correct
Mistakes on your worksheet
And you didn't know what you did wrong
And your head was starting to hurt
But when your teacher said,
"Don't worry, I'll help you."
Remember how her words made you understand
All firmly held, but nice?
That was my teacher.

If you try very hard,
Can you remember that time
When you forgot to wear a cartoon shirt for spirit day
And you were the only one
And you found me an extra one right away?
It took you a long time to find one
Do you remember it was her shirt you were wearing?
That was my teacher.

– *Kathleen Vassallo*

Now the meaning had become the focus of student poetry. Rhyming, for almost all the students took a back seat. "It's okay to rhyme," they seemed to understand, "if I say everything I want or need to say." Most students abandoned the idea of rhyming all together at this time.

By this point, the writer's workshop was alive with poetry. It was satisfying to see what Bruner would call "hand over" taking place, as each day the students became more competent and more independent poets.

To describe the process of hand over, Nancie Atwell tells the story of teaching her daughter how to brush her teeth. At first, she did it for her. The next step was for both mother and daughter to have a hand on the toothbrush, brushing away. Next she watched her daughter, offering encouragement. When the little girl thought she was finished, she was advised to run her tongue over her newly-brushed teeth to see which ones still "had mittens on them." Those still needed to be brushed. In the end, Atwell's daughter was able to brush her own teeth with no input or intervention. Thus, the hand over was complete.

The students were eager to compose and revise; they were better equipped to create original poetry and take risks. Some students were eager to work from favorite poems hidden in their special poetry notebooks. Others wanted to develop themes that emerged from template exercises, trying out their own voices.

Caitlin was daydreaming one day in class and noticed the poster-sized version of Carl Sandburg's "Fog" on a bulletin board. There was an illustration of a lighthouse and a catlike cloud of fog. Caitlin loves horses; all her written pieces in some way return to the theme of horses. She had been working on a poem about Assateague Island and its famous ponies. Click. Suddenly the lighthouse and its flashing light made its way into her poem.

The Island's Guard Tower
It stands tall and proud,
Guarding the gleaming, moonlit channel,
Guarding the wild ponies sleeping in a warm, comfy crowd
It keeps watch over the friendly passing boats.
As the two tiny islands sleep peacefully,
The beauty of the moon in the sky seems as though it floats.
One, two, three. Flash. Flash.
The ponies go to sleep.
The children go to rest.
The island makes but not a peep.
One, two, three. Flash. Flash.
What's this tower that guards boats from shores ever so crude?
What's this tower that watches over the sleeping town?
To which your mind it shall not delude,
A lighthouse that turns my frowns upside-down.

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One, two, three. Flash. Flash.
Assateague Lighthouse.
– Caitlin Campbell

Caitlin purposely used repetition and personification in this piece. She even worked in a subtle rhyme scheme. She wanted to use her words to make the reader see the flashing light house. One way or another, she managed to work in some alliteration and vivid sensory imagery.

Natasha, new to the school district from Russia, released a flood of feelings about her old home versus her new one. She first had written about this subject in prose. Poetry gave her a means to explore her feelings.

Between Worlds
Caught between worlds
Don't know where I belong
One side I long since left
The other side my new home
If someone's saying something
About life over there
They criticize my birthplace
Oh, this I just can't bear
If someone dares to mention
Some fault of this country
Then suddenly all that I left
Is a distant memory

Who knows where life shall take me
But this one thing I know
I will never go back to
What used to be my home
Yet I am so uncertain
If my life I can lead
Not knowing where my heart is
Only knowing that it bleeds.
–Natasha Simonova

Note that this poem about being caught "Between Worlds" is in two stanzas. The desperation she feels trying to fit in is so powerful, as evidenced by her strong word choices. This clearly is far from puny.

Charles is a very mild boy. He has a wealth of knowledge, but has never really seemed interested in sports. However, he found himself getting caught up in all of the hockey discussions brewing around him. Although he has never played himself, he chose to use poetry to put on the mask as if he had.

Goalie
I hear the swish of skates
As the players come closer
Sweaty breath above the ice
Clashing sticks like swords
Fighting for the prized puck
The ice ripples like my tense muscles
Stretching my nerves like strings
Suddenly, the little puck tries to rush past
Crash! I stop its course
Swish! I repel it back to the ice fighters
The game is over
My post is safe
Victory is ours!
– Charles Glass

Anthony, a classmate of Charles, is an ice hockey goalie. When asked if Charles had found the mark with his imagery and quickly-paced lines, he replied, "Yeah, even better than I did!"

Erica shyly slipped this poem on the teacher's desk with the simple request, "May I hang this on the art teacher's door?"

A World of Art
The sky is the easel
Hovering over the world

The water is the paint
Giving adventure and life

The air is the paintbrush
Flying lightly
Swiftly
Through the trees
It's a breeze

And we the people
Who have created
So many features
Cannot be described
As any art utensil
But only as the main illustrator.
– Erica Rounick

Erica found another use for poetry. True, we had been hanging poetry throughout the school for some time, but, this tribute represents a gift of writing. Other students saw what Erica did and the complete and utter delight of the recipient, and began to follow suit. What a difference from "Bubba In Da Tubba"!

This is not to say that every student's poetry transformed into soaring triumphs of literary genius, but the vast majority of the poetry produced was of a much higher quality.

Remember Katie's poem about the beach? She stuck with it and applied what she learned in the many craft lessons. We conferenced about word choice and using specific details. Also, we discussed the use of white space and word placement to

suggest movement, such as the kite flying. Katie wanted the ending to be more powerful, since leaving the beach is often very sad. We spoke about how, when she leaves the beach, she watches out the rear window as the beach gets smaller and smaller the farther away she goes. How could we make what had been her last line suggest that? Did her lion emerge?

The Beach

Wind brushing through your hair,
Flying
a
kite
in
the
air.
Swimming in the cold water,
While on the sand it gets hotter.

As I watch the sun go down,
I'm glad to be at the beach.

We pick up our stuff,
Without a sound

and we leave the empty beach,

Sighing
as
we
go.

–Katie Essenthier

Past attempts at improving student writers' poetry by only teaching lessons on writers' craft were doomed to failure. It's possible that the many lessons on the craft of poetry had actually done the opposite of what was intended. We hoped that these lessons would define poetry and help students write it. The standard "poetry unit" fare turned out to be more of an anchor than a sail. It seems that all of that "learning" forced the student writers to retreat to that safe world of poetry they knew and recognized: Seuss, Moss, Prelutsky and Silverstein.

Obviously those lessons are valuable, but not in isolation. Creating an atmosphere where children gather, select, share and enjoy poetry; are allowed to play with words; experiment with language and take risks is an important first step. Next are providing the scaffolding of parallel poetry and growing through template poetry. And, as the students become more confident and independent, we guided them through the hand-over phase.

There are still signs of struggle, to be sure: Ken is still mulling over where to go with a new piece about Jeff. His struggle is encouraging, however. It's now over how to best say what he needs to say, rather than what might rhyme with "skateboard." That's a big jump.

At the same time, by expanding our own vision of teaching poetry, we have come to accept that Bill has as much right to love "Bubba in the Tubba" as Natasha has to love "Between Worlds." In the final analysis, we had managed to spare ourselves and our students another crash-and-burn attempt at teaching poetry as a writing genre. Lessons gleaned from PAWLP Summer Writing Institutes led us to reexamine and reopen our thinking toward poetry as we'd always done it. We were freed to figure out where the kids were, then lead them — at least most of them — toward greater self-expression through poetry. Now, everyone from Bill to Natasha seems to see what Coleridge meant when he defined poetry as "the best words in the best order."

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Jim Horrell and Gerri Ruckel, TCs with the Pennsylvania Writing and Literature Project, teach in Lower Moreland Township School District. In this article some students' names have been changed.

I Was a Journal-Topic Junkie

BY ANNA COLLINS TREST

When I came through the university education program eight years ago, journal topics were hot. The notion I gleaned from all I was taught was this: any teacher worth half a peck of pencils required students to keep daily journals, and the best way to get them to write in those journals was to assign a journal topic each day. Clutching that little nugget of information, I began categorizing teachers according to their classroom writing practices. To my way of thinking they could be divided neatly into five groups:

1. DUDS: Those who never gave students creative writing opportunities at all.

2. HAS-BEENS: Those who used the old mundane, hackneyed topics such as "What I Did on My Summer Vacation" and "What School Means to Me."

3. SEMI-PROGRESSIVE: Those who used journal topics from store-bought books in the exact order listed.

4. PROGRESSIVE: Those who carefully scavenged only the best topics from the store-bought books and rejected others.

5. EXTREMELY CREATIVE: Those who used store-bought lists as a springboard for developing their own clever topics for journal writing.

I fell somewhere between progressive and extremely creative depending on the day of the week and my state of mind. I had my routine: pick a topic from my list, date it so I wouldn't reuse it, write it on the board, hand out the journals, and give the command to write. Then I would wait fifteen minutes, ask for volunteers to read, take up the journals, write a personal response in each one praising those who wrote and threatening/cajoling those who didn't. It was a tidy little process that we could all accomplish in our sleep - and often did.

I arrived at the South Mississippi Writing Project's Summer Institute with four years of teaching under my belt and the confidant assurance that my advanced approach to journal writing made me an upwardly mobile instructor. I perceived myself as being on the cutting edge of teaching classroom writing. After all, I had by that time a closely guarded, highly coveted list of story starters gleaned from umpteen sources and including such gems as "A Dragon Lives in My Closet," "I Was a Wart on a Witch's Nose," and "My Bed Is a Cloud."

Imagine my dismay when no one asked to see my list. When I casually draped it over my bookbag, no one even noticed. Everyone was busy doing something called "free writing" and "reflection." After a couple of days, I began to pick up on derisive comments made about journal topics. I got huffy. "What was wrong with journal topics?" I asked. "I never could get very good response," said one teacher. "I wouldn't want to have to write about anything as stupid as 'My Life as a Comb' or 'You've Been Captured By a Band of Pirates on the Way to School Today,'" said another.

I moved from huffy to indignant and replied, "If I asked you to pretend you were a watermelon seed, couldn't you just think of gobs to write? Imagine - you're surrounded by moist squish. Your whole world is crimson red. Suddenly there's a blinding light and an earthquake-like crack. You're out! But before you've even tasted freedom, a tongue laps you up, wallows you around, and swallows you. You pass by an esophageal hernia, through a spastic colon, and down to the nether regions. You're searching... seeking... yearning... for a way out..." My enthusiasm peaked, then waned as I realized the group was staring at me as though I had brought new meaning to the word lunacy.

"Did you ever get that kind of response from a journal topic?" one woman drawled laconically. That was the sixty-four thousand dollar question. Had I ever gotten really good writing using journal topics? A time or two but not consistently. "Of course I have. Often," I told the woman. She just rolled her eyes and changed the subject.

This conversation caused a new wrinkle on my brain: could I eliminate journal topics? The idea seemed almost blasphemous. Give up my list of story starters? But I'd worked so long and hard gathering them, and they were so darn clever! One of my all-time favorites was "I Was An Elf in the Christmas Parade." What could be cuter? Granted the results were mediocre as in this piece:

> *I am an elf named Happy. I am in a parade in Laurel. I say Merry Christmas and throw out candy. It is fun. Bye bye now.*
>
> *—Heather, 4th Grade*

I chalked up the mediocrity to apathy or sheer laziness on the part of my students. These kids just didn't *want* to write; they'd rather whine about the assignment. A story starter like "Today I Planted an Egg, and This Is What Happened" really fanned my creative flames. I truly believed that any student who made half an effort could produce a fabulous

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something from that premise. Not so. Some could; most couldn't.

> *Today I planted an egg and guess what? An egg tree came up!!! Then I planted peas and butter beans. Then I went home. I hope our team wins tonight. GO BRAVES!!!!!*
>
> *— Courtney, 5th Grade*

I checked with the other thirteen teachers at our school and discovered their experience to be similar with one notable difference. The pieces their students wrote from journal topics were considerably longer than those of my students. Granted it was still drivel, but it was lengthy drivel. "How do you get them to write so much?" I asked. All of the teachers, without exception, told me that they required students to write at least one page before they could go out to recess. I couldn't do that. Two things I strongly believed: no one should tell a writer how long a piece had to be, and everybody's piece certainly didn't have to be the same length.

Hardheaded soul that I am, I muddled along into spring without altering my journal writing plan. Along the way I read whatever I could find on the issue, talked to anyone I thought could help me, and fumed over the meaningless junk my students wrote. I continued to badger them with cries of, "You're not *trying* to be creative. Just think ... you've opened a jar of Jif, and there in the peanut butter is written the word 'help.' How could that have gotten there? What does it mean? Use your imagination!" Edward, who is a third grader, wrote this response, typical of what most students wrote:

> *It was a big jar of peanut butter. I like peanut butter very much. Somebody wrote in it, but I don't know why. That's all I have to say.*

Toward the end of the school year I was so frustrated that I resorted to giving no topic at all. "You may write about whatever is on your mind," I said. Just as I thought - they had *nothing* on their minds. By the time the school year was over, an Alexander Pope couplet kept repeating in my brain: "Be not the first by whom the new is tried/ Nor yet the last to lay the old aside." While I hadn't come by my methods haphazardly and certainly wasn't going to give them up nonchalantly, I had to admit that cutesy journal topics did not produce good writing. It was time not only to "lay the old aside" but also to try the new. The problem was how to go about it.

All summer long I thought about my problem and how it could be solved. I considered the unique situation in which I teach. Our school serves a different grade of "gifted" student each day. On Monday, all of the sixth-grade gifted students from the ten elementary schools in the district travel by bus to our school for the entire day. On Tuesday, fifth graders come and so on through second grade on Friday. My classes are small, about ten or twelve, but with a total of fourteen teachers we serve about 150 students each day. So many potential writers! How could I make their potentiality a reality?

By the time the new school year began, I had a plan, and it included my perception of what reflective writing could be for children. I had completed the writing project too embarrassed to ask the definition of reflective writing. I was fairly certain it involved contemplation, but beyond that I wasn't sure. Was it like metacognition — thinking about thinking? Could one only reflect on issues and actions? Maybe "one" could, but I didn't think that was practical for my elementary students. However, I felt confident that I could teach them to reflect on a concrete object.

I decided to begin by using real mirrors to teach the reflective process. I borrowed enough for each student to have one. As the students gazed at their own reflections, I asked this question: "What can you think about while looking in a mirror at your own reflection?" As they answered, I categorized each response and wrote the categories on the board.

Student Response Categories

I think I'm a queen.
Pretending/Imagining

I look at my cavities.
Examining/Observing

I think I'm having a bad hair day.
Forming Opinions

What will I look like when I am old?
Questioning

My hair is parted in the middle.
Describing

I'm thinking about when I broke my nose.
Remembering

I look better than my brother.
Comparing

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Everything on my face looks sad today.
Expressing Emotions

We talked at length about the various categories, and I invited the students to give personal examples of each. Then I asked them to look in the mirrors again, reflect on their images, and then write about what came to mind.

When I see myself in the mirror, I think about many things.

Sometimes I look in the mirror, and I see my grandmother's reflection. It reminds me of how she used to call us when she wanted us. I sometimes cry because missing her makes me so sad. I look in the mirror, and I say to myself, "Boy, why did it have to be this way?'

I look in the mirror and think about bad things that might happen.

I think I'm going to fail a test and I won't be allowed to go on a field trip. I look, and I say to myself, "Why am I so discouraged?"

Sometimes I look in the mirror and think about my future, like where I want to live. I even think about what I want to be when I grow up. My younger sister Mandolin tells me I will never do the things I want to do. My older sister Zandra tells me that things will work out if I have confidence in myself. I believe my older sister.

—William, 6th Grade

Another day I asked the students to choose anything from my desk for me to use to model reflective thinking. I asked them specifically to select something very ordinary that they thought would be difficult for me to reflect on. My fifth grade group picked a stapler. As I reflected aloud, I asked them to categorize my reflections.

My Response Categories

This stapler has seen better days.
Forming Opinions

I wonder who invented this thing.
Questioning

Last year a student stapled her finger and I had to do some first aid.
Remembering

It's bright blue and slightly lopsided.
Describing

Paper clips are more useful than this.
Comparing

One student challenged me to *imagine* something about the stapler. "There's no way to pretend about a staple," she said.

"Sure there is," I said. "How about this?" And I related the following: Mrs. T. was sitting at her desk quietly reading journals when she heard a tiny voice chirp, "Good grief it's crowded in here." She looked up, but no one else was in the room. Being the curious sort and a firm believer in listening to tiny voices, Mrs. T. waited patiently. There it was again! "Hey, out there. I could use a little help! One of us is jammed, and the rest of us are crammed!" There was no doubt about it. Mrs. T. had heard that small, metallic voice, and it was coming from her stapler."

For the next three or four times I met with each grade, we continued to practice reflecting aloud on a number of very simple objects in the room until I felt like the students understood the technique. Finally one day I held up a toothbrush, and we brainstormed writing ideas. After the discussion I asked them to write a reflection about the toothbrush. I wrote while they wrote, and I was amazed when the time came to read aloud. Almost every student was able to write something significant. The responses were meaty and varied. From second grade to sixth grade, students had something remarkable to write about that toothbrush. There were great remembrances about lost teeth and braces, opinions about which toothbrushes are best and why, comparisons of people teeth and animal teeth, and wild tales about wicked dentists.

The day after my birthday I woke up and gave myself a good stare in my reflecting glass. I noticed one of my teeth was leaning like the Tower of Pisa. I thought to myself, "I'll give it a little wiggle and see if it's loose." But my mom said, "Don't touch it. Leave it for Dr. Drillo. He'll get it out for you."

I remembered Dr. Drillo, the man who pulls teeth. I didn't trust him. He always got this funny gleam in his eye every time I sat in his chair, and he would lie and say, "Now this won't hurt a bit."

I decided to pull the tooth out myself. I got a piece of paper towel and pushed and pulled. After so much agony, I finally zipped it out. I ran into the kitchen screaming, "Yahoooo!" or in other words, "Thank you, Lord!"

—Monique, 4th Grade

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Over time productivity ceased to be a problem. Journaling was no longer the hair-pulling ordeal it had once been, and reflection became a buzzword for us.

Slowly the students and I were able to move away from simply trying to grind out some writing and move on to other parts of the writing process such as making interesting word choices. As the year progressed, we made a giant leap toward reflecting on famous artwork, classical music, and fine literature. I was always careful to make selections that I believed had meaning for my students.

I got an idea when I looked at a painting called "The Piano Lesson" by Romare Bearden. I imagined I was walking down a sidewalk, and I heard an angry sound. It was coming from the instrument store. I went inside. There was a woman trying out the instruments. She was playing the piano. I said to the piano player, "That was very good. Will you play it again?" A second-grader, Edwin, responded differently!

The music sounded like elephants stomping their huge feet on the ground because they were mad that a leopard came and got their baby.

We reflected on paintings by Claude Monet and Pieter the Elder:

The rosie, red poppies surround and swallow
The resting family like a small child
Devouring his first meal since yesterweek.
—Susannah, 6th Grade

I imagine Pieter the Elder's painting "Peasant Dancers" shows poor country people dancing at dawn to celebrate the king's birthday. They are happy. I know because their lips are not in a straight line. Their lips look like a "u" with their smiles so big and wide showing their white teeth.

I imagine that later that day the king dies, and his son becomes king. Three months later a secret agent is in town, and he hears a servant telling a friend how he poisoned the king. The secret agent tells the new king, and new King James hangs the servant and his friend. No servant ever tries to poison the king again. All the people live happily in my imagination.
—Allen, 4th Grade

We reflected on poetry:

When I hear Longfellow's "Arrow and Song," I think about my fort in the woods covered with trees. The sun shines through them like a river of light going in so many different directions I can't keep track of it. Before I know it, I am standing in that river of sunlight and millions of thoughts run through my mind like cars on a busy highway. I sit and for once enjoy nature's sweet sounds.
— Fredrick, 6th Grade

And we reflected on music:

I am listening to "The Gypsy Baron" by Johann Strauss. The music is pretty and exciting. Part of it sounds slow, and part is fast. It makes me feel good and happy like the time.

I went to Pep's Point. When I went to Pep's Point, I got a mat. We had to wait in line for our turn. When it was our turn, Mom and my brother and me put our mats together and went down. Around the curves we slipped up and then back down. The mat felt wet, and it went zoom like wheels on a skate board. I was going so fast, and I was so full of excitement that I felt like it was my birthday.
— Joshua, 2nd Grade

Looking back, I think there are several reason why this strategy worked so well. First of all, when the students wrote, I wrote using the same reflection item they used. This was a new experience for me. Initially I didn't write with students because I was a new teacher and didn't have time to use the bathroom, much less write with my students. Over the years I read their miserable little responses, and I simply didn't want to show them up and make them feel bad about their feeble efforts. Writing with my students made a tremendous difference in their perception of journal writing. They began to believe that it *must* be important — the teacher did it.

Now when we shared our writing, they asked me to read out loud what I had written. They especially liked the times when I would tell them, "I wrote garbage today. I just couldn't think of anything creative." Through that little confession, they came to see that *all* writers have days when they cannot produce something wonderful.

Secondly, we succeeded because we spent so much time discussing before we wrote. In the past I have been guilty of severely limiting pre-writing conversation because I thought too much talk would give away too many ideas. Now I see that's the point — to

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No Excuses: An Interview with Eugene Garcia

BY ART PETERSON

Last Spring Eugene Garcia, Dean of the University of California's School of Education, gave the keynote address at the Conference on English Language Learners held at the University of California, Berkeley.

In his remarks Dean Garcia quoted the conclusion from *No More Excuses*, the final report of the Hispanic Dropout Project (US. Department of Education, 1998). Garcia had served on this project and participated in developing this report though, he says, he takes no credit for "the eloquence of its conclusion" which states:

"We submit this report with a sense of urgency and impatience because of the slow pace of improvement.... There are dozens of proven programs, replaceable programs capable of increasing Hispanic students' achievement, increasing school completion and increasing their college-going rate....Why then the persistent gap in Hispanic student achievement? Many explanations have been offered: student characteristics such as social class, language, and entering achievement levels, especially among recent immigrants; school-based forces such as student retention, ability groupings and tracking; and non-school forces such as family and/or neighborhood violence and criminal activity, lack of community based opportunity and the historical and social and political oppression of different ethnic and racial groups. Many of these "reasons" have assumed mythic proportions. They are used to explain phenomena that are portrayed as too large and too complex for the nation's schools to address. In short, these reasons have become little more than excuses for society's failure to act. We as a people need to say: No more excuses for the time to act is now. (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, p. 61-62)

Garcia explained that in an effort to be comprehensive in its practice reform agenda, the report addressed separately recommendations for Hispanic students themselves, their parents and families, their teachers, and the schools in which they are served.

In an interview with Dean Garcia, *The Quarterly* asked him to focus on one set of the report's recommendations, those directed at teachers who were identified by the report as crucial in the intellectual and academic development of Hispanic students.

The Quarterly: The report urges teachers to teach content that interests and challenges Hispanic students. What are some ways that content can be become more stimulating and lively for these students?

Garcia: Teachers of non-English students should choose, at least some of the time, to use quality material written in Spanish. After all, good literature is good literature, and much excellent literature is written in Spanish. When we teach our students to analyze a literature text written in Spanish, we are, in fact, teaching the tools necessary to analyze English literature. Why not sometimes teach these skills using a quality text in the students' native language?

Also, increasingly there are texts available that make use of both Spanish and English. A favorite book of Hispanic students is *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo A. Anaya. This is a book that, because of its subject matter, pretty much demands the writer make use of both languages to convey its situations and ideas. Such a text helps Spanish-speaking students appreciate the power of bilingualism.

Then also, teachers need to seek out texts that relate more directly to the lives of Hispanic students than many of the texts we've traditionally used. *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros packs the same kind of power for an adolescent as J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. But the setting and context of *Mango Street* make it an excellent choice for teachers interested in awakening their Hispanic students to the power of literature.

In fact, any book about the immigrant experience, and not just the immigration of Hispanics, is going to have special meaning for these English Language Learners. And it works the other way around also. I think, for instance, that for elementary students, *Two Pair of Shoes* is a book that, while it is about a girl who immigrates from Latin America, speaks to all those kids who are living in two cultures.

The Quarterly: Let's talk specifically about writing. What strategies can a teacher employ that are particularly useful to English Language Learners?

Garcia: One writing form that seems to have special value is the interactive journal. A journal in which the student and the teacher are carrying on a conversation is a safe place for students to try out their English. And writing in this format is a chance for students to write about what they want to write about, not always "about

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the book." This context gives teachers a special opportunity to learn about the concerns of students coming from a culture about which the teacher may have little direct knowledge.

The Quarterly: The report also expects teachers to communicate high expectations to all students. How does it happen that we have come to expect less of Hispanic and other minority students?

Garcia: It seems to me that many educators fall victim to what I call the "Pobrecito Syndrome." That's a mind set that works like this. "These poor kids; their parents are working two jobs. We can change this. We can get them out of the fields and make them store clerks." These limited horizons are just not acceptable.

The Quarterly: So you support educational standards.

Garcia: Sure, I support standards-based language arts education, with clearly articulated expectations. But standards will only be effective if they are combined with strategies that work for these students: after school programs, summer school and other structures that will make it possible for immigrant students to achieve what is expected of them.

The Quarterly: Is there community support for these standards?

Garcia: The Hispanic immigrant community does not share what has been called the "oppositional" mentality of some other groups that have lived a long time within the system. These groups have watched the system fail them, so they have a distrust of

"reforms." They often look at the kind of programs I am suggesting as a kind of punishment. But when the parents of Hispanic immigrant children are confronted with the possibility of summer school to bring their kids up to the expected standard they say, "Of course there should be summer school." But this attitude should not make us complacent. If we do our work badly in these areas, parents will figure it out pretty quickly and they too will become oppositional.

The Quarterly: Is it fair to say that the attitudes and programs teachers need to implement to help Hispanic immigrant students are the generally same kind of programs necessary to help all students?

Garcia: This is pretty much true. Let me give you an example. What we've usually seen in teacher assignment patterns is that the newest teacher will get all the immigrant kids. This is going to set up a strong possibility of failure, both for the teacher and the students. The ninth-grade teachers in one high school we've worked with, where there is a 60% immigrant population, said, "We're not going to do this. We're all going to take all the kids." They worked collectively, math teachers, science teachers, language arts teachers. They developed an interdisciplinary curriculum for all students. A yearlong study of immigration became the centerpiece of this effort.

The Quarterly: Did these changes in the ninth grade affect the rest of the school?

Garcia: Yes, the departments began to work differently. There was much more communication among members of the same department and between departments. Counselors did more than negotiate student programs; they became student advocates. The honors program was opened up to all

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willing to accept the challenge. More students are finishing school and GPAs are up.

The Quarterly: The report also asks teachers to engage parents and community in the education of their children. How is this involvement different for immigrant parents?

Garcia: Parents from other nations have a different conception of the responsibility of the school. In Mexico, Japan and Korea, parents expect that teachers will have a good curriculum. The U.S system operates on the basis of parent advocacy. The truth is you are going to be taken advantage of if you don't communicate with the teachers. But schools need to be proactive in helping these parents understand what is going on in school and in what ways parent participation is necessary to help their children learn. One school in Berkeley, Columbus, has a program worth looking at. They have a parent liaison who serves more as a community advocate than as a representative of the school. Parents are invited to Saturday meetings at the school that are conversations not "top down" lectures. These conversations are relevant to the kids' academic work. There is none of the preaching that has characterized such session in the past. Everyone comes to learn. Baby-sitting is provided. Parents need not wait around for the occasional teacher conference that they may or may not be able to attend.

But its not just at Columbus School. Models such as this are being taken up with considerable success all over the country. As the report from the Hispanic Dropout Project makes clear, we know what to do; now let's do it.

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make available plenty of ideas, to crank the creative motor, and to be certain there is something familiar about the road the students will travel. I think that the discussions and subsequent writings convinced many of a Trest Truism: if you can say it with your mouth, you can write it with a pencil. Extended, meaningful conversation also resulted in one other unexpected dividend. Students began asking if they had to write about the discussion topic or if they could write about something else that came to mind while we were talking. I was pleased to acquiesce.

Another reason this plan was successful was because I chose starting points that were relevant to the students. Elementary students are extremely concrete and literal in their thinking, but that doesn't keep them from being creative. They just can't be creative about elves and peanut butter messages and other things with which they have had no experience. When I stopped relying on goofy subjects, I was able to tap into the students' prior knowledge which included love of the outdoors and things of nature. When I gave up the eggs and the elves and offered a branch instead, Edward was able to give me the following:

> *A leaf is a remarkable thing. It helps ants when there is a flood. They can get under it like an umbrella so they won't get washed away. A leaf helps caterpillars stay alive because the caterpillar can eat a healthy leaf lunch. A leaf is also like a big cup for a wasp. He gulps down the water ... glug, glug, glug.*

Anna Collins Trest is a TC with the South Mississippi Writing Project and a teacher at North Forest High School, Hattiesburg, MS. This article is based on her former experience teaching in an elementary school program for exceptional students.

Revising Words, Revising Worlds

BY GRETA VOLLMER

Over the course of the 1997-98 school year, I found myself a part of a vibrant writing community in Ms. Andersen's[1] third period ESL Writing class. As I observed and tutored, students from places as diverse as Tibet, Ethiopia and Germany wrote poems, agonized over topics, and embarked on long fables of ancient heroes or dramatic stories of contemporary teenagers. Working in pairs, they wrote "Partner Letters" to each other, providing feedback on each other's work. Ms. Anderson prodded them to respond specifically to one another's writing, asking responders questions like, "What good writing techniques do you see?" "Where could the author add more words?" "What is the theme in this poem?"

I have found myself frequently considering the use of peer response, a widely accepted feature of the writing process we encourage. Why do we do it? The reasons Ms. Andersen put forth will ring true for many. She said, "I want my students to have a sense of audience other than the teacher; I want to convince them of the importance of the reader, of negotiating an understanding with that person on the other side of the page. I want them to learn 'the language of response,' to be able to articulate their ideas about writing. And I want them to hone their writing skills by looking at other's papers, then learn to turn that same discerning eye on their own work."

Yet in spite of the clear rationale for facilitating peer response, ESL teachers often remain ambivalent about its use. For one thing, ESL students are often unconvinced of the rationale underlying the practice, stubbornly insisting that the teacher, and the teacher alone, "correct" their work. Kim, in an emotional outburst in one class, expressed this sentiment: "We feel it's uncomfortable when we do it. You're the teacher — you teach me! But this is all friends, and we can not do it!" At other times, teachers worry that English language learners lack the proficiency to provide adequate feedback, or that the wide range of language levels in a single class make it problematic for students to understand each other's work and respond in a helpful way.

These concerns are real. Yet, throughout the year, I also came to wonder whether our concerns about language may leave untouched a richer source of interaction, a way of making sense of the many cultural worlds that inhabit our ESL classrooms. Good writing is more than simply putting thoughts on paper and organizing them well. Writing at its best expresses the core of a writer's identity, with culture an integral component. But does "culture" have a place in the writing classroom? Perhaps not if we define writing as purely a skill, a necessary skill our students need to survive academically. But if instead we define language (in all its forms) as social practice, then "culture become the very core of language teaching" (Kramsch, p.8). Claire Kramsch, in *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*, argues that "[c]ulture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing. It is always in the background … ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least … challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them" (Kramsch, p. 2). Our cultural world view is clearly an integral part of all we write and think. By focusing on surface levels of response, and asking our English language learners to do the same, I wondered, have we shortchanged them and pushed to the background the cultural identities that inform their writing?

The God Peach

Back in Ms. Andersen's class, the sun beats into the warm room as Tran leans intently over her work. Next to her, her partner Tsega is more distracted, tapping her long, brightly colored nails impatiently on the desk. Both are writing "Creations" on self-chosen topics of any genre or length. Tsega is considering her story, "The Poisoned Lipstick," while Tran reads over her first draft of the "God Peach":

> *It takes 1000 years for the peach to blossom and it takes 10,000 years to be able to eat. What so good about the peach that all the people want to eat it? Even the monkey king and those angel want to taste its sweet tenderness.*
>
> *Once upon a time up in the heaven the Peach garden was blossoming, big and juicy. One peach was three times bigger than the living peach and juicy as everything you wish. One of the princes want to eat it, but the King, her father does not want her to eat the peach because if she eat it she will become pregnant. She does not listen to her father that she sneak in the peach garden and stole one. After she ate it her stomach become so big and huge that she have the baby. On that day all the women in the living earth can become pregnant any time.*

Revising Words, Revising Worlds

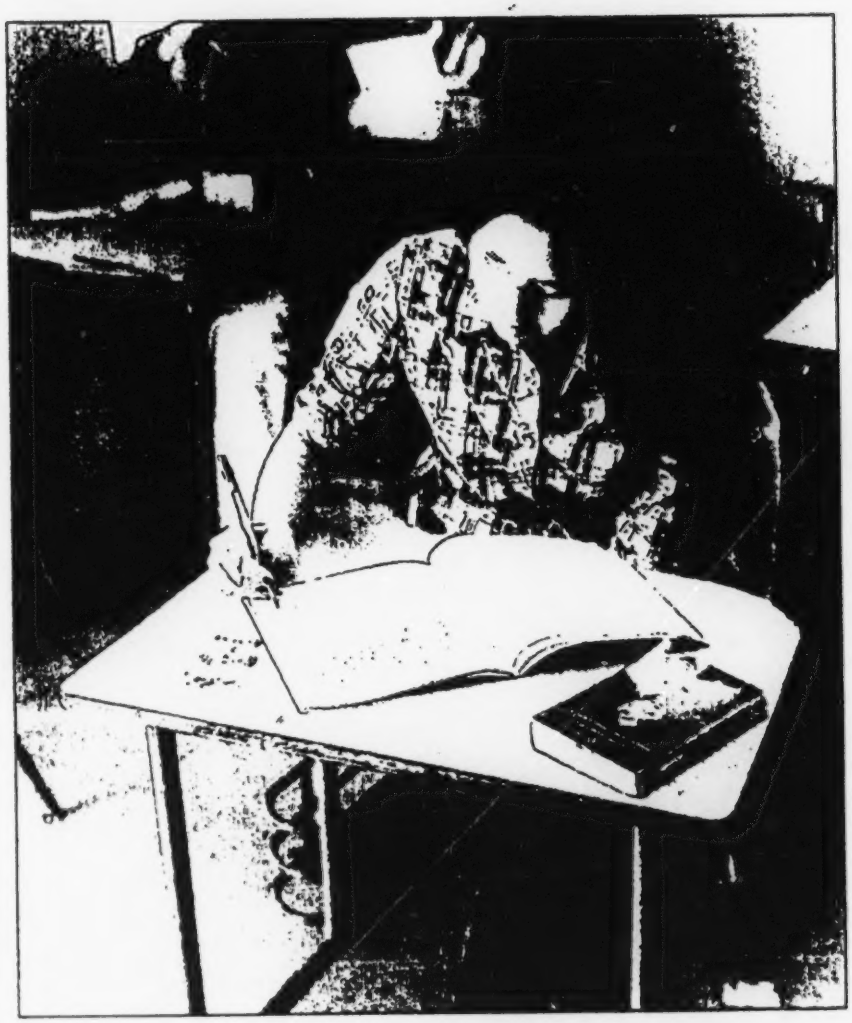
Again, the prince want to eat the peach and when he sneak in the garden, he stole one and ate it. While he chew the peach, one of the guards walk in and in his hurry he swallow fast and got choke in the middle of his throat. That peach stuck in his throat and become the legend that is why all men have the Adam's apple.

Her first draft complete, Tran gives it to Tsega for comments. In a Partner Letter, Tsega responds carefully and at length, offering her "suggested changes" for Tran's story. She writes:

Their names were Adam and Eve. Their God told Adam not to eat the fruit (maybe peach but I don't remember what kind of fruit. ... The snake tells Adam and Eve to eat the fruit. God was sad, and then Adam regret why he broke his promise - that's why all men have Adam's apple.

The next day, Tran and Tsega engage in an animated discussion of the tale. Tsega likes the tale; she says: " I think it's true. I think it's history. It is a Bible story." She then adds earnestly, "If you were Christian, I think you can describe the story well, but it's still good. If you were a Christian, you could write this really good." With a spirited grin, Tran looks at Tsega: "I don't want no God in there!"

Ms. Andersen, overhearing the conversation from across the room, comes over to confer with the girls: "What we have here is a cultural clash. One cultural tradition is being stuck on another, and you, Tran, don't want it stuck on. That's OK. Tsega, you must not feel offended that Tran is going to end



up rejecting all of your suggestions because she wants to keep the story Buddhist. She doesn't want God in there. She doesn't want the Christian story."

As Ms. Andersen moves away, Tsega adds apologetically, "I had to say something." Tran nods and turns back to her paper, "It's OK!"

Over the next few days, Tran moves on to her second draft, focusing on adding descriptive adjectives, and cleaning up the grammar. She explains the role of the prince and princess more carefully, adding that "because they are the children of the gods, whatever happens then it will happen to everyone on earth." Her one major changes lies in the revised ending:

From this we know that we should listen to our parents. The more you

wait, the more the peach will taste better. I really want to try to god's special peach, but I know that there is no way I could taste it, because it was just a fairy tale.

Tsega's comments are handed in along with her final draft, but no more is said of them.

A Cultural Faultline

What happened here? A failed dialogue, an opportunity lost; two cultural perspectives approached each other but were left unexplored. As a writer, Tran was not pushed to examine the meanings embedded in her legend, nor to take into account the meanings that Tsega attributed to it. Tsega, for her part, simply came to the sad conclusion that Tran was not capable of telling this story, since it so clearly belonged to "her" cultural background and not Tran's. I couldn't help but be struck by the richness that went untapped in this peer response conference.

What might have happened instead? Perhaps as teachers we need not to abandon such "cultural faultlines" (Kramsch 1993) when they occur, but explore them — and offer our students tools for doing the same. Kramsch terms this task one of "entering a sphere of interculturality", a sort of third place that allows learners "to take both an insider's and outsider's view" of both cultural perspectives (p. 210). She explains further: "If meaning emerges through social interaction, it is pointless to try and teach fixed, normative phenomenon of language use...teachers should be encouraged to recognize the rupture points in the logic of explanations brought forth by their students in order to bring cross-cultural aspects of communication to the fore" (Kramsch, p. 205-6).

Seizing upon this interaction as a rich cultural faultline, the class as a whole could have examined the motifs the two versions have in common — the explanations of the origins of body parts, the consequences of eating forbidden fruits. Many other cultures have folktales attributing conception to the eating of fruit - mangoes in India, peppercorns in Rumania, berries in Finland (Thompson, p. 849). Why is this? What purposes do such stories serve? How are they constructed as a genre? From this discussion, Tran might also have been nudged to examine more closely the contradiction between her emphatic assertion about not wanting God in her story, and the title of her story, the God Peach. What kind of God is she thinking of? As writers, both Tran and Tsega, by seeing through the eyes of the other, could have reached a negotiated understanding not only of each other's version of the tale, but of the deeper cultural value such stories hold.

In my mind, I returned to our rationales for peer response: a sense of audience, a sense of ownership, a negotiated understanding with a reader. If we truly want these negotiated understandings to enrich student writing, do our ELL student have the tools to explore the cultural faultline that will inevitably emerge? Instead of being ambivalent about peer response in ESL classrooms, I would argue that we need to explore the possibilities for true cross-cultural understanding and see it as a potentially rich, not problematic, part of our writing classes. If the channels of communication had been fostered and kept open, the differences explored, Tran might have come to a deeper sense of ownership, a sense of what really made this legend, and others like it, part of her Vietnamese culture. Instead of two "conflicting" versions of a similar story, an understanding of the commonalities would have offered both writers the chance to explore the role of legend and myth in a culture. This type of peer response, of "peer negotiation," could lead to deeper knowledge, not just of word choice, or sentence structure or organization, but of the world views that inform our writing. Perhaps then Tran would have been less apt to dismiss her creation as " just a fairy tale" in the end.

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

Greta Vollmer, a TC with the Bay Area Writing Project, teaches in the College Writing Program at University of California, Berkeley and is a Ph.D. candidate in the University's English Language and Literacy Program.

Annotated Bibliography on Teaching English Language Learners

BY NORMA MOTA-ALTMAN

Norma Mota-Altman, Director of the National Writing Project's English Language Learners Network, has developed a close to comprehensive, annotated bibliography of the most important works available on the subject of teaching English Language Learners. Here we present a small piece of this extensive and impressive work. The complete bibliography may be viewed on the NWP website at nwp.berkeley.edu.

Anderson, Valerie and Marsha Roit. "Linking Reading Comprehension Instruction to Language Development for Language-Minority Students." ***The Elementary School Journal,*** **Vol. 96, No. 3, 1996.** The authors report on work they have done over 7 years with language minority students in grades 1-6 in the U.S., and grades 6-8 in Canada. They identified six instructional issues related to reading comprehension and to language development, i.e., English language flexibility, use of abstract and less imageable vocabulary, consideration of larger contexts, determination of important and unimportant text segments, elaboration of responses, and engagement in natural conversations. The authors argue that these issues are teachable abilities that increase both text understanding and oral language proficiency when taught to students. Ten instructional suggestions for implementing these abilities, by grade level, are discussed. Practical instructional suggestions for the classroom.

Boyle, Owen F. and Suzanne F. Peregoy. "Literacy scaffolds: Strategies for first- and second-language readers and writers." ***The Reading Teacher,*** **Vol. 44, No. 3, Nov 1990.** Provides examples of scaffolding activities that facilitate successful encounters with print and show children early on that they can learn to read and write. Discusses how literacy scaffolds enhance reading and writing for first- and second-language learners alike.

Celce-Murcia, Marianne. "Grammar Pedagogy in Second and Foreign Language Teaching." ***TESOL Quarterly,*** **Vol. 25, No. 3, Autumn 1991.** The article looks at trends of the past 25 years regarding the role of grammar in language teaching. The author proposes a decision-making strategy for resolving the issue of when and to what extent, one should teach grammar to language learners. The author further argues that grammar instruction is part of language teaching because it interacts with meaning, social function, and discourse- or a combination of these- rather than standing alone to be learned for its own sake. "The article concludes with a survey of options for integrating grammar instruction into a communicative curriculum and with a reformulation of the role of grammar in language teaching."

Elley, Warwick B. "Acquiring Literacy in a Second Language: The Effect of Book-Based Programs." ***Language Learning,*** **Vol. 41, No. 3, Sept. 1991.** "In contrast to students learning by means of structured, audiolingual programs, those children who are exposed to an extensive range of high-interest illustrated story books, and encouraged to read and share them, are consistently found to learn the target language more quickly. When immersed in meaningful text, without tight controls over syntax and vocabulary, children appear to learn the language incidentally, and to develop positive attitudes toward books. In some cases, the benefits are found to spread to other subjects and languages."

Ervin-Tripp, Susan M. "Is Second Language Learning Like the First?" ***TESOL Quarterly,*** **Vol. 8, No. 2, June 1974.** This article is still as relevant today as it was in 1974. The author questions whether the process of second language acquisition looks like the first. The study looked at English speakers learning French in a natural setting in which communication rather than form was the learner's focus of attention. "The study showed that in many respects the development of comprehension of syntax and of morphological features follows the order in mother tongue studies."

Genishi, Celia. "Observing the Second Language Learner: An Example of Teachers' Learning." ***Language Arts,*** **Vol. 66, No. 5, Sept. 1989.** A monolingual kindergarten teacher records her observations of four L2 learners in her classroom. Several critical points about the process of language learning and effective teaching in general are made. One, each child follows his/her own unique timetable and an unpredictable path toward L2 learning. Second, classrooms with a variety of activities and potential situations for talk, have the best chance of supporting the L2 learner. Third, in the classroom, the teacher is at the heart of the L2 learner's support system.

Annotated Bibliography on Teaching English Language Learners

Henze, Rosemary C. and Tamara Lucas. "Shaping Instruction to Promote the Success of Language Minority Students: An Analysis of Four High School Classes." ***Peabody Journal of Education,*** **Vol. 69, 1993.** The authors seek to define what is actually known to "work" in teaching language minority students at the secondary level. They identify three crucial areas: good teaching practices for all students that rely on intuitive teaching talent; the realities of support and/or constraints in the secondary school context; and good research based teaching practices for language minority students. The authors looked at four distinct classrooms and identified what a good class and a good teacher do and how they do it. The class descriptions and commentaries are helpful in defining effective practices for teaching language minority students.

Jackson, Francesina R. "Seven Strategies to Support a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy." ***Journal of Reading,*** **37, Dec. 1993/Jan. 1994.** While school populations are becoming more ethnically, linguistically, and economically diverse, the teaching force in the United States is becoming more homogeneous. There are specific strategies that most American teachers already employ but may not recognize as ones they can use to enhance multicultural learning. The article describes seven strategies that are integral components of a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Lim, Hwa-Ja Lee and Dorothy J. Watson. "Whole language content classes for second-language learners." ***The Reading Teacher,*** **Vol. 46, No. 5, Feb. 1993.** ESL teachers can help students reach their potential English proficiency by shifting the focus of instruction from direct teaching of language to using classroom strategies in which language is naturally and functionally learned. Talk that emerges from whole language content experiences has the characteristics of talk as a means of learning rather than talk as a target of learning. Thus, second language learners can learn intellectually interesting content while increasing their language proficiency.

Lucas, Tamara, Rosemary Henze, and Ruben Donato. "Promoting the Success of Latino Language-Minority Students: An Exploratory Study of Six High Schools." ***Harvard Educational Review,*** **Vol. 60, No. 3, August 1990.** The authors state that "schools are responsible for the quality of education students receive, and that given a good education, all students can achieve." They then asked, what makes some schools more successful than others in promoting success for ELL students? The authors studied six secondary schools that have been recognized for their success in providing quality education for ELL students. The study focused on the whole school rather than on classroom practices, and identified eight features that promote the achievement of ELL students.

McKeon, Denise. "When Meeting 'Common Standards is Uncommonly Difficult." ***Educational Leadership,*** **Vol. 42, No. 8, May 1994.** "Because limited-English proficient learners bear an exceptionally heavy cognitive and linguistic load, they need stepped-up assistance to help them meet new content standards." The author goes on to list a set of opportunity-to-learn standards for LEP students as well as three problems that impede LEP student achievement. The article ends by suggesting five simple steps that educators can take to ensure that LEP students will meet content standards.

Peyton, Joy Kreeft and Chuck Jones, Andrea Vincent, and Les Greenblatt. "Implementing Writing Workshop With ESOL Students: Visions and Realities." ***TESOL Quarterly,*** **Vol. 28, No. 3, Autumn 1994.** The authors looked at the data from 16 ESOL teachers over the course of a school year in describing the challenges of implementing Writer's Workshop with ELL students. How do teachers successfully use Writing Workshop to teach the writing process and to build language and literacy levels? The authors found teachers needed to adapt the following areas to meet the needs of their L2 learners: getting students started writing, conferencing and sharing, and revising. Good description of ways that writing workshop for ELL learners differs from writing workshop portrayed in the literature. Stresses the need for teachers to have time, support, and resources in order to "own in practice what they have learned in the abstract."

Norma Mota-Altman is co-director of the UCLA Writing Project and director of NWP's English Language Learners Network.

A Personal Bibliographic Essay: Excerpted from *Teacher -Researchers at Work*

BY MARIAN M. MOHR AND MARION S. MACLEAN

This fall The National Writing Project will publish Teacher-Researchers at Work *by Marian M. Mohr and Marion S. MacLean. Mohr and MacLean, both longtime TCs with the Northern Virginia Writing Project, have been leaders in the field of Teacher Research since the mid-1980s. In their book the authors bring together their many years of experience and reflection in the field to create a seamless web of good advice for aspiring and accomplished teacher-researchers as well as leaders of teacher research groups.*

We want Quarterly *readers to get a taste of this seminal work. So we reproduce here the essay with which Mohr and MacLean introduce the extensive bibliography that concludes their book. The essay provides a tantalizing glimpse into the thinking of these two accomplished educators. However, the books listed here are merely a taste. For the complete bibliography, readers should consult* Teacher Researchers at Work.

Mohr and MacLean supplement exploration of the process of teacher research with examples of such research from the teachers with whom they have worked. One of these pieces, "Drawing: Another Path to Understanding" by Theresa Manchey, follows this bibliographic essay.

In this essay we explain the impact of our reading in relation to eight ideas that have influenced our thinking about teachers as researchers. We are grateful to these writers and hope that in our discussion of their ideas we are true to their intentions.

1. Challenging Assumptions About How People Learn

Some researchers have served us as exemplars for challenging established, authoritative theories. Margaret Donaldson in *Children's Minds*, Carol Gilligan with *In a Different Voice*, and Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule in *Women's Ways of Knowing* have demonstrated to us the value of assuming a questioning stance, particularly when research marginalizes specific populations or is conducted on marginalized populations.

Donaldson opens *Children's Minds* in this way: "In the course of this book I argue that the evidence now compels us to reject certain features of Jean Piaget's theory of intellectual development. It may seem odd, then, if my first acknowledgment of indebtedness is to a man whose work I criticize.... No theory in science is final; and no one is more fully aware of this than Piaget himself" (p. ix). Similarly, Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* challenges the work of Lawrence Kohlberg by questioning the extent to which the stages of moral development for men are applicable in the moral development of women. Like Donaldson and Gilligan we learned to challenge existing authorities, question traditional assumptions, and rethink what was "known" in order to see what was actually happening and what might happen.

From these researchers and others we also learned to recognize the power differential between the researcher and the researched. We saw that researchers who work with marginalized populations are ethically bound to challenge their assumptions about the relationships between them as part of the study. These researchers served us doubly well when they themselves were, as teachers sometimes are, part of the marginalized populations.

As a teacher determined to understand the task before her, Mina Shaughnessey saw her students and their writing as the subject of her learning. Her work *Errors and Expectations* examines the logic behind the errors made by her freshman (basic) writing students when the City University of New York first implemented its open admissions policies in the 1970s. Instead of using their "deficiencies" and errors as ways to rate their writing as inadequate and failing to meet standards, Shaughnessey assumes the stance of a researcher — a teacher-researcher. By probing and understanding the principles of her students' learning and usage, she challenges her assumptions not only about the teaching of writing but also about her students' abilities and capacities for learning.

Both of us came to Mina Shaughnessey's work through the Northern Virginia Writing Project. Her work served as an important example of the basic principles of the

Book Excerpt: *Teacher-Researchers at Work*

Writing Project — not just about student learning but about how teachers learn. Observing students, writing about teaching, asking questions of students about their learning, and challenging assumptions were all part of our shared experiences as teachers in the writing project — a fertile place for the seeds of teacher research to grow.

2. Using Qualitative, Naturalistic, and Interpretive Research Methods

The concepts of qualitative, naturalistic, and interpretive research are basic to our ideas of teacher research. We both originally learned educational research against the backdrop of experimental and quantitative methodology. When we read Eliot Mishler's question, "Meaning in Context — Is There Any Other Kind?" we recognized a fundamental principle with which we could, as teacher-researchers, agree. When Eliot Eisner asked, "Can Educational Research Inform Educational Practice?" we understood him to mean that, really, there was no useful or meaningful educational research that did not come from the context of the classroom and the teachers and students within it.

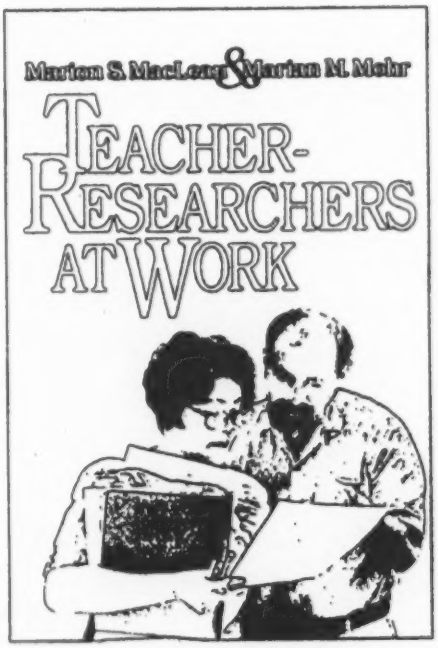
The experimental and statistical educational research with which we had been familiar seemed far removed from classrooms. Our own research was grounded in the day-to-day interactions with our students. In the work of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, we recognized the description of such groundedness in their theory-building methodology. Their explanation fit and articulated further our own theory-building methods. In addition to Glaser and Strauss, the work of Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln gave us a legitimate research vocabulary — terms like discovery, interpretation, and invited interference. Their work also helped us think about limits to a researcher's claims and approaches to our own involvement in our research.

Mishler, Eisner, Glaser, Strauss, Guba, Lincoln, and others challenged fundamental existing ideas about what research should be and what it should do. Their work helped us conceptualize the broad field of research as one that could include teacher research.

3. Working amid Power Issues and Politics

We recognized that, as teacher-researchers, our work was complicated significantly because of the compulsory and hierarchical nature of public education. How could a teacher not know the answers to questions she asked her students? How could a school principal turn to classroom teachers to discover academic goals for the school? Who would own our research? Who would value it? These questions highlighted the fact that we were in the midst of political issues and that our power to affect those issues was limited. We saw educators and researchers like James Comer, Linda Darling-Hammond, Ann Lieberman, and others including ideas about the political nature of schools as they wrote about educational reform and change.

Other issues we faced as teacher-researchers were political by definition. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* highlighted the political and often risky nature



of teaching (and, by extension, teacher research) by describing education and society in terms of power relationships, construction of meaning, and self-determination. Teacher research calls into question the current structure of school systems and the hierarchical system of the profession, for in both of these the knowledge of teachers is not often rated highly either as knowledge or as a basis for decision-making.

4. Redefining Teaching

One of the early "redefiners" of teaching for both of us was Donald Graves, whose 1981 article "Where Have All the Teachers Gone?" expresses the need for teachers to conduct research in their own classrooms. He helped us see teacher interpretations as fundamental to any understanding of teaching and learning in a classroom.

Book Excerpt: *Teacher-Researchers at Work*

We also found in the work of Lawrence Stenhouse explanations for a way of seeing connections between the processes of teaching and researching. He describes an educational system that is responsive first to the classroom, a radical shift in the relationships within the hierarchy of a school system and the profession in general, a shift that establishes learning and research as the fundamental purposes of education.

Other work that defined teaching and teacher knowledge helped us to conceive of teaching and research together, and also to clarify distinctions between teacher research and other descriptions of teacher knowledge — action research (Ernest Stringer), teacher lore (Stephen North), reflective teaching (Donald Schön) and critical pedagogy (Paulo Freire).

We turned also to occasional papers from the Institute for Research on Teaching (IRT) at the College of Education, Michigan State University. These papers provided us with the work of, among others, Magdalene Lampert, a public school teacher and a university researcher whose "How Do Teachers Manage to Teach? Perspectives on Problems in Practice" introduced us to another researcher reconceptualizing the nature of teaching.

5. Seeing the Classroom as a Field for Anthro-pology and Ethnography

Similarities exist between teacher research and the fields of anthropology and ethnography. Sometimes laughter ripples through a group of teachers who suddenly imagine themselves anthropologists trying to understand a strange and remote culture — that of their students. Another facet of this point of view, however, is the most important to us — respect for those being studied and their "culture." To understand that students have knowledge of value to the teacher and not just the other way around, that the context of the classroom is shared, is a change of profound importance.

From the work of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz we learned to think of "thick description" (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 3-30) as a way to build credibility for a context-dependent study of a place, like a classroom or a society, and reminded ourselves often to avoid "we-logical, you-confused provincialism" (*Local Knowledge*, p. 149) that applied very well to the world of teaching and schools. We found that much about James Spradley's strategies in *The Ethnographic Interview* made sense (with some adjusting) for teacher-researchers.

In the 1986 *Handbook of Research on Teaching* we discovered that Frederick Erickson had concluded his section on qualitative methods with a description of teacher research and the comment that "Real Women and Men who were school teachers, principals, parents, and students, as well as those who were university-based scholars, might find themselves doing ethnography… as a form of continuing education and institutional transformation in research on teaching" (p.158). We began to see that teacher research was not only redefining teaching, but also research on teaching.

The *Handbook of Research on Teaching* pointed us to other places where we could find other researchers engaged with similar issues — the Anthropology and Education Quarterly and the University of Pennsylvania Ethnography in Education Conference. We were developing both practical and theoretical ideas about research methodology that could be useful to teacher-researchers in classrooms.

6. Seeing the Classroom as a Society

Classrooms work as small social organizations as well as small cultures, and therefore another kind of reading that has been useful to us has been social science research. We read through basic introductions to social science research to glean methodological ideas we could adapt from authors like John and Lyn Lofland in Analyzing Social Settings. George J. McCall and J. L. Simmons's *Issues in Participant Observation* introduced us to "The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis" by Barney Glaser. Ongoing analysis by constant comparison was a method we could use for managing and making use of a research context that we lived with daily for nine or ten months of the year. A teacher's class could be studied as a whole, we saw, as well as smaller groups and individuals within it.

7. Connecting Teaching, Philosophy, and Language Theory

Many theoretical works from different fields have contributed to our thinking. Lev Vygotsky's *Thought and Language* and *Mind in Society* have been important in terms of both seeing language as a tool and seeing research as a way of stepping back to reflect and know that we know. His books articulate the role of reflection and use of language in gaining insight and in making assessments about our teaching, but Vygotsky's work also helped us understand the roles of reflection, language, and play in our students' learning.

Book Excerpt: *Teacher-Researchers at Work*

Michael Polanyi's *Meaning and Personal Knowledge* argues that the processes by which we create meaning are those that we implement ourselves, building on our prior knowledge and constructs, and creating a working knowledge that has meaning for us in our own contexts. As a fundamental principle of teacher and student learning, Polanyi's idea underscored for us the importance of having teacher-researchers identify their own questions and of supporting the individual nature of their research purposes.

Readings from the broader context of philosophy and theory — professional journals such as Educational Researcher, popular magazines such as Scientific American, and books in the fields of literature, science, history, and philosophy — also influenced our understanding of our work. We saw theories of teacher research in places where the authors had no intention of including such ideas. The connections we made resulted from our own questions about how teacher research fit into the larger field of educational research and its standing in theoretical debates like those about positivist thinking and constructivism. Often another teacher-reseacher would bring one of us an article from a totally different context and say, "Read this. It sounds just like teacher research."

8. Teaching and Researching

When they became available, we read books about teacher research itself, works written about the subject by colleagues from whom we have learned much. Dixie Goswami's *Reclaiming the Classroom,* Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle,* and *Inside/Outside* by Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle were especially influential in our thinking, as were responses to our own *Working Together*. We compared our work with that of others interested in teacher research to see how we were alike and different in continuing conversation.

We have advanced our own reading in the fields related to teacher research mostly by continually exchanging books, articles, tapes of speeches, and bibliographies. Mohr once received two books by Clifford Geertz as a birthday present from MacLean. MacLean once returned a book to Mohr that she had discovered on her shelves with "M. Mohr" plainly written on the flyleaf. Mohr discovered the same book on her shelves inscribed "M. MacLean." We have copies of articles that show each other's underlining and highlighting. And, of course, we have talked and talked. As we talked, we examined others' work in the light of our own experiences as teacher-researchers. Always, our practice was our grounding. This process continues, and our wish is that you will have similar opportunities to talk with colleagues about your ideas as you read further in the field.

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Drawing: Another Path to Understanding

BY THERESA MANCHEY

Theresa Manchey teaches in Frederick County, Virginia, at James Wood High School, where she is English department chair. To initiate a teacher research program, she garnered support from school administrators, educated herself and colleagues about teacher research, and responded to the interests and needs of fellow teachers. Manchey is a recognized leader in her school district, where she now leads teacher-researcher groups, but her teaching experiences are the grounding for her thinking and action.

In the year of the research reported on here, Manchey became intrigued by the effects of an assignment she had used off and on during several years of teaching. She remembers when a class had studied first Candide *and then* Billy Budd, *and she had first asked her students to draw a metaphor representing the life of Candide. The results were up on the bulletin board. When they finished reading Billy Budd, they repeated the assignment and placed those drawings on the bulletin board as well. At once the students began to see differences in the pictures and to discuss how those differences were related to the literature. They began to create their own literary theory, and Manchey never got to give her prepared lecture comparing the two books. Even though she is a "stick figure" type of artist, she says, she wanted to learn more about the effects of drawing and sketching to learn and understand literature.*

The Question

For several years I have included drawing in my English classes as a means to help students see big concepts and to provide an incentive for closer reading of a text. Recently my school chose to implement a block schedule. Longer class periods (90 minutes) allow more time to complete drawing activities, and I've found myself using them more frequently. This year a conversation with another teacher caused me to rethink this method. Talking about her feeling that students in her single period classes were doing better than students in her block class, she said, "In the single classes we just move right along." No one likes to believe they're asking kids to do useless "stuff," so I began to wonder: what effect does the drawing have on students' learning? Is it really worth the time invested in it? I decided to investigate and began by asking my English 10 students to recall what they could of the topics we studied first semester.

Gathering Data

Our course was organized into units based upon the archetypes or story patterns found in one of our texts, Man the Mythmaker. When the students responded to the survey, they had completed the first two chapters of the text, "The Earth Belonged to Them All," a series of creation myths depicting the idea of a golden age and "The God-Teacher," stories such as the Prometheus myth in which humans received special knowledge from their gods. As a review of the second unit, the students were organized into small groups and asked to draw their concept of these mythical figures who taught humans important lessons. In looking at their responses to this preliminary survey, I noted several references to the drawings we did as well as other visual cues:

- We drew pictures of our ideal god-teacher.
- I remember the picture we drew [of the god-teacher].
- I remember when we made the god-teacher posters, too.
- There was a musical score on one page and a piano with things placed inside to alter its tones [a reference to a page in their text].

One student volunteered the following information about her learning:

> *I learn best when we do things besides read and log, read and log, for example: games, movies, filmstrips, drawing, etc.... Reading and logging is okay sometimes but the information just doesn't stick.*

There was certainly some indication that the drawing played some role in the students' memories of units of study. I followed this initial investigation by closely observing students' reactions to other drawing activities through the year.

Some Drawing Assignments

Next, I assigned *A Separate Peace*, by John Knowles, and asked students to do a

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drawing for each chapter rather than the usual written response (log). My idea was to focus on symbolism in this book, and I hoped certain objects — the tree, the river, etc. — would surface in these drawings and help students see the relationship of these objects to the meaning of the story. On the day the drawings were due, I asked students to spread their drawings out and look for objects that occurred in more than one drawing. Not surprisingly, all the major symbols from the book surfaced in the ensuing discussion. Their drawings were very interesting: some included quotes from the book (Figure 1), some were completely visual (Figure 2), others relied heavily on words (Figure 3).

After a quick survey of which objects occurred in the drawings of most or all students, we looked at a few objects that were found in only one or two students' work (such as Anne's locker drawing mentioned below). I felt the assignment had been really successful since the objects that occurred most frequently in the drawings were those most critics agree have symbolic value in the book, and the occurrence of personal symbols in some drawings helped us make some distinction between universal and personal symbolism. Because the students had already chosen these objects as significant by using them as representative of events in particular chapters, they found it easier to see how Knowles could use such objects symbolically. By the end of class, I felt we had achieved one of the objectives for study of this book as I had recorded it in my journal of 1/3/95.

> *I'm thinking tonight there are 2 things I want to get from* A Separate Peace:
>
> *1. How symbols occur and function in a novel and 2. Vocabulary building.*

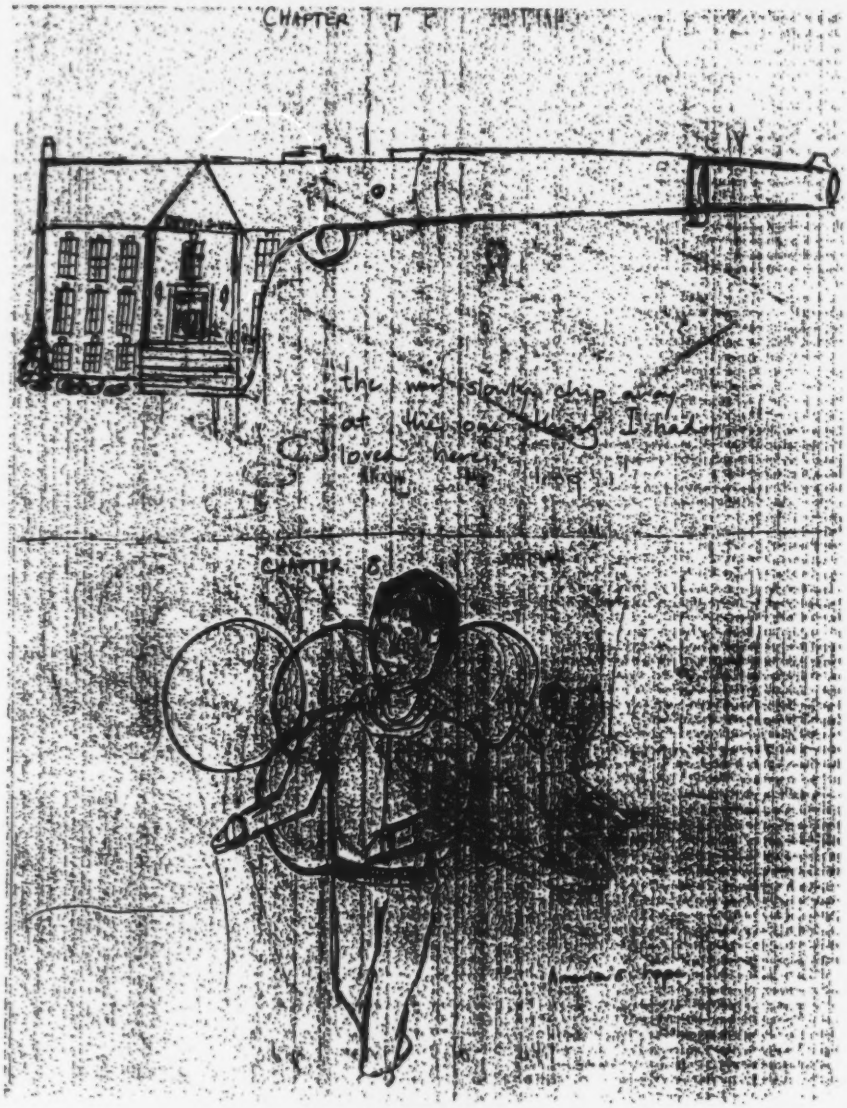

Figure 1

At the conclusion of that activity, I asked students to reflect on the merits of this drawing in contrast to the usual written responses to the reading. Almost all students said they enjoyed the break from writing, though several kept logs along with their drawings. Most indicated the drawings helped them focus on the main idea of

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each chapter, while writing brought reactions to the smaller details. They found the drawings took less time than writing and were not as much of an interruption to their reading. Other interesting comments were:

> *Some things are hard to express in words.*
>
> *A picture captures an important moment in time.*
>
> *Sometimes a chapter gives me a picture in my head.*
>
> *Pictures give words actions.*
>
> *Using colors helps show emotions.*

A few students described the process they used in determining what to draw:

> *I run through pictures of events in the chapter and pick the main one.*
>
> *I weigh the importance of events.*

Others felt the pictures would benefit them later:

> *Seeing the pictures makes you remember the chapter.*
>
> *I'm able to visualize the story later.*

Colleen added a less positive comment about the picture logs on her midterm exam:

> *I think writing logs helped me understand more than the picture logs although they [the pictures] were easier.*

Colleen's comment alerted me to a pattern that seemed to be emerging — some students seem to rely more on the written word than others.

Figure 2

After our discussions of *A Separate Peace*, I assigned an essay demonstrating how one symbol was used in the book and a visual project presenting the main symbols. The paper was due about a week before the project. I wondered after looking at their comments on the drawings if perhaps I should have reversed those due dates. When I posed this question to the students, the responses were mixed, but they favored doing the visual first by about two to one. Some representative comments were:

> *I think the visual should have come first because when I was thinking*

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about what to do for it, I gained a better understanding of how I actually looked at the different symbols of the book.... I could've used my thoughts from that to help me with my writing.

I feel the visual was somewhat of a brainstorm for me and gave me more ideas.

Interestingly, these two comments come from students with widely different degrees of artistic talent. Both show the feeling of the two-thirds of the class who saw the visual project as a means of pulling together their thoughts on the symbols.

The other third had equally clear statements of how the process worked for them:

The essay helped me think of ideas and things to do for the visual.

Working on the essay first established the background and content of the visual.

One student indicated a benefit from all these visuals that I had not anticipated — the ability to *see* and learn from other students' ideas:

I think the project could also have gone before the essay and that would have been helpful too because then everyone would have gotten more input and ideas to use in their essays.

When asked if they used their picture logs to complete these two assignments, the students were almost evenly divided. Some representative comments follow. Some said the drawings were a kind of road map for them:

I did use my pictures occasionally. Mostly when I was trying to find a certain part of the book.

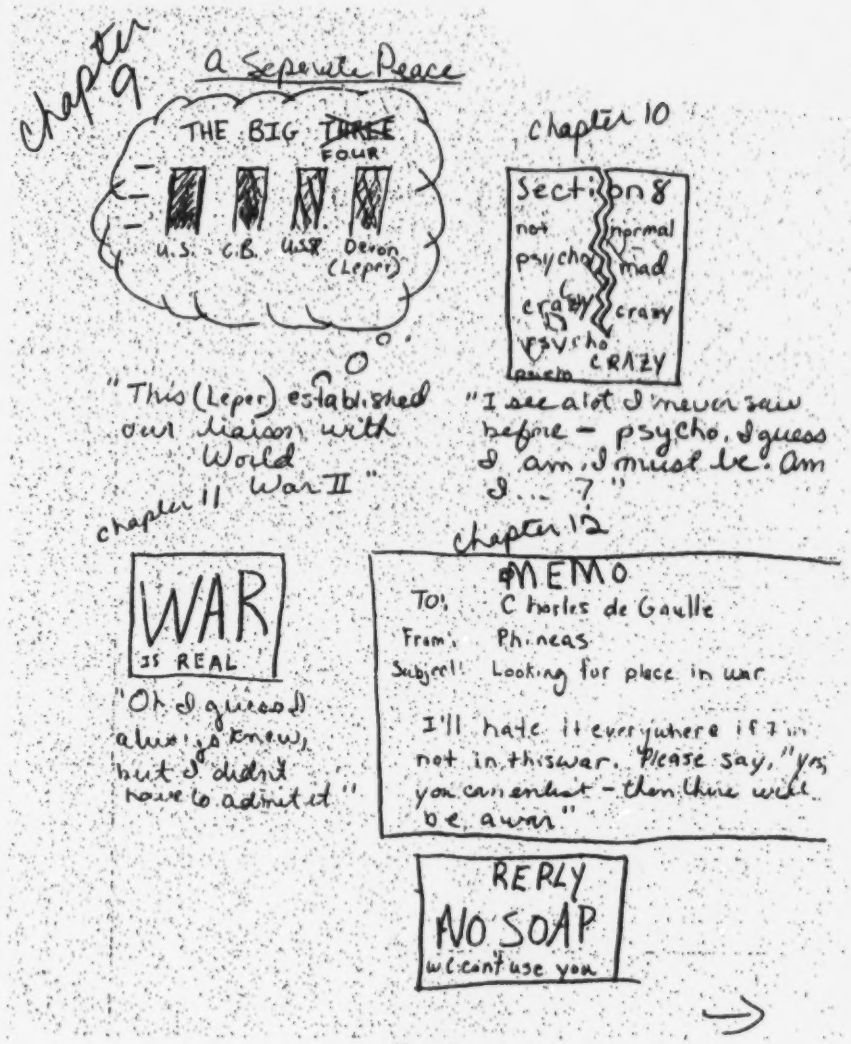
chapter 9
A Seperate Peace
THE BIG THREE FOUR
U.S. G.B. USSR Devon (Leper)
"This (Leper) established our liaison with World War II"
chapter 10
Section 8
not psycho
normal
mad
crazy
crazy
psycho
CRAZY
"I see a lot I never saw before - psycho. I guess I am. I must be. Am I...?"
chapter 11
WAR
IS REAL
"Oh I guess I always knew, but I didn't have to admit it"
chapter 12
MEMO
To: Charles de Gaulle
From: Phineas
Subject: Looking for place in war
I'll hate it everywhere if I'm not in this war. Please say, "yes you can enlist - then time will be away"
REPLY
NO SOAP
we can't use you

Figure 3

Others systematically reviewed their work looking for patterns:

For my visual I looked at all the symbols I drew and carefully decided which one to draw. I also looked at how I drew them in my chapter drawings and decided if they had any special meaning.

For my essay I used them to look at the different ways that I had previously looked at or thought about the water.

Some who did not use the drawings cited the quality of the drawings as the reason:

I'm not very good at drawing and it would be hard for me to interpret them anyway.

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Others noted their preference for words over pictures:

> *... I looked back in the story. I don't believe the drawings were a good idea.*

The essays proved to be quite good and showed the understanding of symbolism that had been my original goal. Two students actually mentioned their drawings in their essays, even though they were not asked to do so.

> *While I was reading A Separate Peace, I didn't notice a lot of the water. Even when I drew my pictures, I didn't make the connection. It wasn't until we laid all of our drawings out that I noticed.... In my pictures I had drawn the lake, the ocean, the rain, and Gene and Finny swimming... it [water] plays an important role.*

This first excerpt is most interesting since Rose had indicated that she did not use her drawings to help with the essay.

The second excerpt shows how a personal symbol surfaced in the drawings:

> *The main reason I remembered this part [Gene's open locker] is because for my Chapter 13 picture I drew the locker left open. When asked about the symbolism in the book, this part came directly to my mind, and it stuck there. This part of the book was a powerful image to me so I analyzed what I felt the symbols were. By playing sports I know when I see an open locker that is empty it symbolizes the end of a season, clearing out and going on. Gene's locker represents the end of a season for him too.*

It seemed I had achieved my objective. The drawings had helped most students see the role of symbolism in this novel. While a few students claimed the drawings did not help them understand the novel, none really felt the drawings were a hindrance to their reading. In addition, I discovered that having those projects displayed in the room was helping students see more interpretations of the story and its symbols.

Taking a Look Back

In the midst of this study, a member of my research group, Vicki Pitcock, told me that drawings from my classes last year had been mentioned in her class. She had asked what they knew about the idea of the hero. Several students recalled that we spent considerable time on the hero archetype. Then Susan remembered a drawing they did showing a metaphor for the hero's journey. "She seemed kind of surprised like she thought the drawing hadn't meant anything until just then," Vicki said. Susan's memory of that drawing then set off a kind of "wave effect" in the class as others remembered their drawings and thus the pattern of those hero stories.

As a result of this experience, I decided to interview a student from last year's class to see what she could remember and if drawing had any role in those memories. An excerpt from that interview follows.

T: One of the things I'm interested in is the drawing activities we did. Can you remember any of those at all?

M: Like in our projects?

T: Uh huh. What you did for your projects and we did some group drawing in class.

M: The charts and stuff we used to do. I don't know if it [drawing] helps a lot, but like looking at them [the group drawings] — it helps you remember. When you looked at them — when you come into class, you remember what you did last time.

Once again the idea of the drawings as memory aids was surfacing. Mary went on to say that she didn't feel the group drawings were all that helpful for her but did say there were some small benefits.

M: I don't know... I think it was fun. They say that drawing is really a stress reliever and that... we did think about oh we could use this because that means symbolism and put that on there and let's do this... maybe more of a time limit.

Our conversation next turned to the value of art projects. Mary's attitude was quite different toward this type of visual.

T: What about your projects?

M: I loved drawing like projects. Remember the time I made that shirt from reading... um, uh, about the school.

T: A Separate Peace.

M: Yeah. I loved that and I like made that shirt. I really had fun doing that. I had like a lot of fun doing the drawing. I did one this year that really looked like a person. Yeah. The face looked real.

T: What do you think you get out of doing a project like that where you have to draw rather than write?

M: I don't know... you can... like with the shirt, I like thought of like a lot of different aspects that I could use in it... like different events or you can... I don't know... it kind

of helps you pick out... if you want to draw a picture of an event or a person that you really thought was the best in the book or the most interesting... it kinda... I don't know... it's more fun actually than having to write if you don't like to write very much.

T: Is that selection process, uh, you know like you said you had to think about it and pick out what you were going to draw or decide what colors to put on the shirt and all that?

M: Uh huh.

T: Do you think that that makes you look at the book any differently?

M: Yeah, cuz I had like both sides of the shirt to fill up so... yeah, cuz I went through each thing and oh I can put this on here like this and the symbolism that we used... I think you can do a lot of that in your drawing... oh I used this for a symbol for... you know, you can put 'em in your drawings.

The last thing I did was to run through a list of the drawings we did last year and ask Mary to respond if she remembered them. The only response she had was to the drawing of a metaphor for the hero's journey:

M: We made a puzzle and all those obstacles that they went through. Oh yeah because they'd start out then they'd get sidetracked and hurt and then they'd find their way back home and finding their family or whatever and coming home to it. I remember that one.

Mary's mixed response to the drawings seems to indicate that she found the individual projects more beneficial than the group drawings, but in both cases my objective of having students think more carefully about their reading and having them find a pattern in groups of stories was met. In addition, she showed me an unexpected value of the drawings, they reminded students of the previous day's lesson, a valuable benefit when classes met on alternate days.

Another Assignment

At about the same time, I began a read-aloud with my English 9 students during which they were asked to do a drawing at the end of each chapter and to write a chapter summary. My purpose in this assignment was to encourage the students to visualize the events of the story as I read to them. On their semester exam, these students were asked to recall events from the story and later were asked which activity most helped them to complete that question—the summaries or the drawings. Some said that neither helped; they had not considered looking through their folders to help them answer the question. Several, however, did indicate that the pictures were most helpful.

To follow up on this information, I decided to interview one of those students. An excerpt from that interview follows:

T: When you read, do you visualize, in other words, get pictures of what you're reading?

E: Yeah.

T: Do you do that almost all the time or ...

E: Not really. Sometimes...

T: Okay. Let's talk a little about the *Deathwatch* thing where we did the drawings. Um. When I was reading out loud to you, could you picture what Ben was doing?

E: Yeah. Sometimes. When he was in the sand in the tubes. I could picture that...

T: Do you remember any other parts?

E: When he was uh... shot Madec... and what you read today.

T: The trial part.

E: Uh huh. I could picture that....

T: Now, I wonder, you may not be able to answer this, but when you knew you were going to have to draw a picture... did that have any effect on how you listened to the story or...

E: What do you mean?

T: Well, I guess I mean, were you more likely to try to get a picture in your head because you knew you were going to have to draw a picture?

E: Yeah, kinda... yeah, I guess so.

T: Don't say it if it's not true... That's one of the reasons I was having you draw the pictures was to see if I can help you make those pictures in your head all the time when you read. So if it didn't do that, I want to know.

E: It did. It'd make you, you know, really think what they look like and what's going on.

Ellen seems to be undecided herself about the extent to which she visualizes while reading and the extent to which my assignment helped her. There is some indication that this kind of "forced" visualizing may be helpful. I think that at least the area deserves further exploration.

One More Assignment

All the talk we have done about drawing this year led me to try one more idea that I

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picked up at an Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development conference last year. The presenter suggested using drawings to help students learn vocabulary words. During our study of *A Separate Peace*, I asked students to list any unfamiliar words they found. At the conclusion of their reading, I had them select ten of those words and make flash cards on which they drew a picture showing the meaning of the word on one side and wrote the definition on the other (Figure 4).

About two months later, I had students take out their cards and we did a series of activities to determine how many of the words they still remembered and the extent to which the drawings aided their memory. Only three students indicated that their memory was unaffected by the drawings. Some representative comments follow:

I believe the drawing is a very good way to help. If you can get a mental picture of what it is then you can put the definition into words.

When I was taking the quiz the only way I was remembering the words was by remembering the pictures.

I missed five, but the other five I remembered because the picture would come to mind.

Before I have never really pictured what strange words meant, but having pictures really helps!

When my partner read just the words, I remembered some pictures. For example, I remembered the picture for languid, portliness, inebriate, and cogitation. But when we used the pictures it helped me a great deal. I think by visualizing the pictures I can remember these words more easily and for a longer time period.

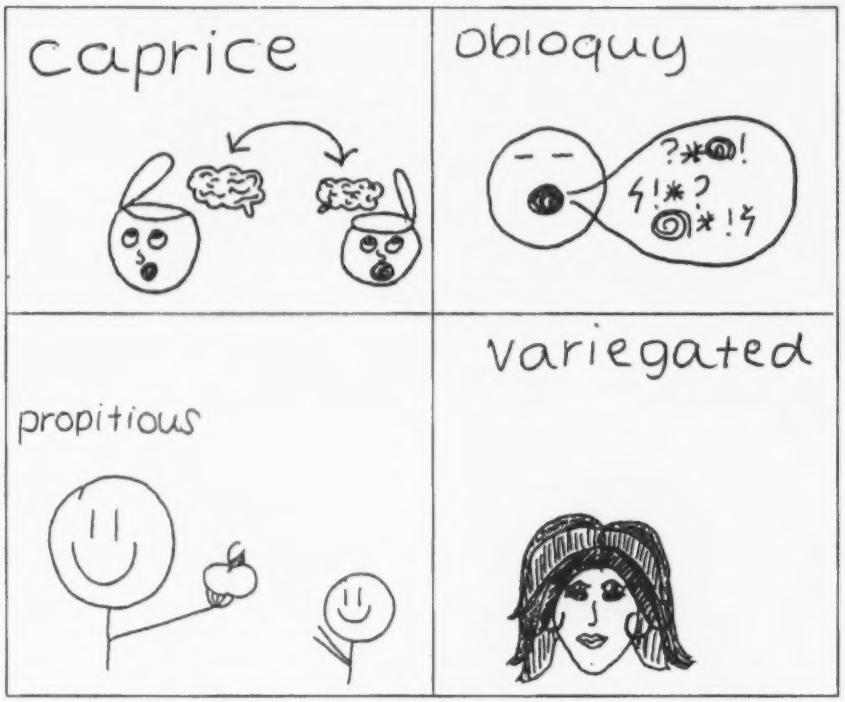

Figure 4

I forget things I cram for very easily. I remembered these words because I enjoyed making the pictures and could remember making them.

Drawing helps a lot. You have something to place with them kind of like a reasoning behind them, the answer to why?

One student really spelled out what others had hinted at as the key to their success with these particular words and the role of the drawings:

I think the pictures helped because I drew them and I knew what they were supposed to be. I think if I was looking at someone else's drawing I wouldn't have know the words by the pictures.

This activity seems to have helped the most students and to have elicited the most enthusiastic response of any drawings I've tried. Such a response makes me trust my original belief that all this drawing in English class functions as a memory aid for students.

I Can't Draw

In several instances throughout this research, the students expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of their drawings. Such statements are common when students talk about these assignments, and I'm most sympathetic to the feeling. My own drawing "talent" is limited to stick figures and smiley faces. As I have discussed this

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research with adults, most have asked if the students resist drawing. In fact, I have met with no such resistance over the years. I'm not sure why that is in light of the fact that many students apologize for the quality of their drawings. Maybe it's because crayons and markers on the table are an indication that today we'll be doing something different —not "just" reading and writing. When students say, as they often do in response to a drawing assignment, "I can't draw," I just respond, "That's okay, this isn't an art class, just do the best you can." That simple response has worked so far. Another key may be that students' drawings are prominently displayed in my classroom all the time. Most of these are group drawings done within a class period. Perhaps the presence of these single draft works encourages others to give the drawing a try. Perhaps I should have asked my students why they don't seem to mind the drawing. Maybe next time I will.

Conclusions

My investigation has raised more questions than it has answered so far. There are a few things I believe can be said at this point.

- Drawing has more power for some of my students than for others, but occasional drawing activities do not seem to hinder anyone's learning.
- Drawing seems to be useful when used to pull together large concepts or to help students see a broad pattern.
- Drawing may also have value for readers who do not naturally visualize as they read to help them make that visual connection to the words of a story.
- Drawing can serve as a memory aid for large concepts as well as small bits of information such as vocabulary words.
- Having students' drawings and projects displayed in the classroom allows students to learn from each other and helps set the tone for each day's class.

Some big questions remain:

- Are students' responses to assignments that involve drawing directly related to their learning styles?
- How useful can drawing be for students who do not normally visualize as they read?
- What role does talk about the drawings play in learning? Is it helpful to have to "defend" one's drawing before class?
- What type of talk goes on as groups work together on a drawing? What role does such talk play in learning?

The answer to that initial question raised by my conversation with my colleague seems somewhat clearer now. In the future, I will continue to use drawings and I will not feel they are a "filler." Still, I will continue to observe my students' responses to these assignments, and I will heed Mary's caution to impose more of a time limit on such activities, but I will also remember Jane's needs:

> *The poster or project lets you put all your ideas and feelings into one. They all come together. I think the visual helps me understand the story a little better.*

I believe school offers little opportunity for students like Jane to exercise their strengths. Maybe further studies in this area will help to change the current balance of time in our classrooms.

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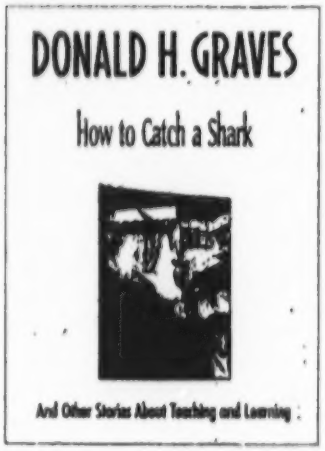
Teacher-Researchers at Work, by Marian M. Mohr and Marion S. MacLean, is a comprehensive, 312 page volume that thoroughly explains the process of teacher research and provides a variety of examples written by teachers-researchers like Theresa Manchey. Teacher-Researchers at Work *sells for $15.00, with a 20% discount to NWP Associates. To order, phone (510) 642-0963.*

How To Catch a Shark

BY DONALD GRAVES
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. $15.00; 134 pages

REVIEWED BY BOB SIZOO



It seems like every book I pick up about teaching writing includes in the preface an acknowledgment to Don Graves for revolutionizing the author's teaching practices. If you've read *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, the more recent *Fresh Voices*, or any of Graves' books on teaching and writing, you know why. I know of no more observant kidwatcher and no stronger advocate for schools as a place to help students find their places in the world.

In *To Catch a Shark*, Don Graves examines his own learning — but not those lessons learned during his formal education. Rather he probes those experiences and relationships in which he learned valuable lessons outside of school. He learns from teachers as diverse as a stranger sitting next to him on an airplane, his Uncle Nelson, and his wife, Betty.

Character education is a hot topic in the public forum on classroom practice. But how does one "teach" students to have good character? Anyone with more than a few days of teaching experience knows that posting the Ten Commandments on the classroom wall is not the solution. Kids learn to be moral citizens by watching the behavior of people they respect, and from reading and hearing stories.

To Catch a Shark serves a dual purpose; it shows how and from whom Donald Graves has learned about life, and it subtly explains what he's learned, as well. From his wife, he's learned how to elude the aging process. Uncle Nelson demonstrated lessons on topics ranging from boulder splitting to showing compassion for one's neighbors. A golf pro's instructional methods informed Don's teaching practices twenty years after his one golf lesson.

The story, "The Man on the Plane," dramatically shows the effect of quality writing instruction on a student and his family. Upon meeting Don Graves, "the man" mentioned he was from Boothbay Harbor. When Graves asked if he knew Nancie Atwell, the previously remote stranger suddenly became animated. His son, B.J. Sherman, had her as a teacher; the man said, "That woman saved my son's life." It turns out that Atwell had helped B.J. find a form in which he could write about the difficult topic of leaving his mother. Graves says in the commentary, "Life is simply too short to have our students write about topics that have little connection with issues that mean so much to them."

Graves follows each of his thirty-one stories with a commentary and a suggestion/writing prompt. As well as being entertaining and illuminating reading for teachers, many of these stories could be read aloud in a classroom. The commentaries could give students a window into the writer's thinking process, and many of the prompts, though written to a teacher audience, could be used to encourage student writing on a similar trajectory. Prompts include: "Think of a time you have been misunderstood — How did it affect you?"; "Think back to a time when your own prejudices surprised you and subsequent events showed your initial impressions were unfounded."

A few of the stories reflect rather "adult" lessons learned; "The Preacher," profiled in the piece of the same name, demonstrates such effective public speaking that Graves' presentation style was forever influenced. If you've seen Don Graves speak, you know of his inviting and thought-provoking style. As a writing prompt, we're asked to consider mentors from our past. Most of the stories, however, I would read aloud to my sixth-graders. Many are perfect for younger writers/readers; "Shoe Tying" celebrates Graves' mother's teaching style and asks us to recall an early teaching experience with one of our parents. The Science Lady in "Meet Myrtle" asks Don to prove that his cool bravado is for real by cozying up to a twelve-foot boa constrictor.

We in education have heard a lot of talk about encouraging students to become lifelong learners. To do so, we must help them see that education isn't just book learning. In the introduction to *How to Catch a Shark*, Graves says, "Thousands of stories become part of us during our lifetime. The question is, can we recall these stories with any profit? Can I reach back and recall stories that might help me not only to understand myself but to assist others in teaching and learning?" After reading *To Catch a Shark*, I think he has answered both of these questions with a convincing, "Yes."

Bob Sizoo is co-director of the Redwood Writing Project in Arcata, CA.

The Courage to Teach

BY PARKER PALMER
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998. $22.00; 199 pages

REVIEWED BY RUIE J. PRITCHARD, NAN MASSENGIL, SHERRI MERRITT, &ANDY JACKL

Parker J. Palmer's inspiring book, *The Courage to Teach*, (Jan. 1998) was the basic text of the 1999 Level II Institute of the Capital Area Writing Project at North Carolina State University. Although a reader can certainly benefit from a solitary study of this book, to focus on it in a learning community offered us the relational way of knowing that Palmer promotes: to "help us reclaim the capacity for connectedness on which good teaching depends" (p.56). The integrity and identity of a good teacher, Palmer asserts, occur only when the person who teaches is truly present in the classroom and is deeply engaged in the lives of his or her students and the wonder and challenges of the common subject. In short, we teach who we are. In CAWP, each of us would develop this concept into a teaching credo.

In the pre-reading exercises we completed for Palmer's book, we explored who we are through personal lists and freewritings that were spirited by quotes such as these: "We do not merely find a subject to teach—the subject also found us" (p. 25). "Teaching is what teachers use until the real teacher arrives..." (p. 5). "Good teaching is an act of hospitality toward the young, and hospitality is always an act that benefits the host even more than the guest" (p. 50). "Every gift a person possesses goes hand in hand with a liability" (p. 71). "If we want to develop and deepen the capacity for connectedness at the heart of good teaching, we must understand—and resist—the perverse but powerful draw of the 'disconnected life'" (p. 35).

In Rosenblatt's terms, these quotes prompt an aesthetic reading (lived-through experience) of Palmer's book, rather than an efferent (fact-gathering) reading, which seems entirely in sync with Palmer's message of connectedness. We wrote about our "Ahah!" experiences in our own education, what we know best about our students, good days of feeling connected, techniques we called up to get us through our bad days, the gifts our students give us, and the paradoxes and questions we face in teaching and learning. Embedded in our egocentric teaching stories are those spiritual questions we ask in our quest to connect with the largeness of life. Palmer calls these questions "spiritual" in the broad sense, even if they are not about God or angels:

- *Does my life have meaning and purpose?*
- *Do I have gifts that the world wants and needs?*
- *Whom and what can I trust?*
- *How can I rise above my fears?*
- *How do I deal with suffering, my own and that of my family and friends?*
- *How does one maintain hope? What about death?* (Palmer, Dec. 1998)

When such questions are evoked in public education, the deepest needs of the human soul to be connected are honored. Palmer points out that "evoked" is the proper verb, for the spiritual is always present in education whether we acknowledge it or not: "Spirituality—the quest for connectedness—is not something that needs to be 'brought into' or 'added onto' the curriculum. It is at the heart of every subject we teach, where it waits to be brought forth" (Palmer, Dec. 1998).

When Palmer tells a personal story, it always has a point larger than himself; as we teachers read his book, our own parallel stories were elicited and shared. Following are three accounts by high school English teachers of how Palmer's book spoke to the "inner landscapes" of their teaching lives. Nan Massengil writes about a personal and professional paradox that she faced in trying to demonstrate that she is a master teacher for National Board Certification; Sherri Merritt shares her courageous battle to be faithful in her own teaching to what she was professing in her doctoral dissertation; Andy Jackl describes how Palmer's concept of the "Community of Truth" found relevance in his teaching.

The Paradox of Teaching Who You Are

Nan Massengill
Clayton High School, Clayton, NC

I am a self-defined workaholic. Not only am I a workaholic, I am driven to be the best at whatever I attempt. It is for this reason that I recently found myself taking a Level II Writing Project while completing the National Board Certification process; both activities, I hoped, would augment and improve my teaching. Just as I was about to be overwhelmed by the surge of grading

and paperwork, the parent contacts and planning, we began to read *Courage to Teach* in the CAWP. As I struggled to complete everything I had begun, I found myself reassured by Palmer's interpretation of teaching.

I particularly understood Palmer's discussion defining the "paradoxes" of teaching. As I read, with stacks of ungraded essays at my side, I felt as if Palmer could see into my classroom, into my mind. Teaching for me had separated into the poles of success and failure. In addressing the National Board teaching standards, I felt as if I were failing my students so that I could be recognized as a "master" of teaching. Sounds like a paradox to me. If I were really the greatest master teacher, I would be reaching my students! I began the National Board Certification process because I felt confident that I am a good teacher. But as I worked through the process, I found myself doing some things in direct violation to my teaching credo. National Board Standards demand that I know my students personally; however, to demonstrate that knowledge, I had to write an extensive 15 page analysis which took my attention away from my classroom and students. To know my students personally, I needed to spend time with them, analyzing their responses to our activities and listening to their comments in class. Thus the paradox of proving myself a master teacher assailed me: should I spend more time on the students or more time on the essays? In frustration, I found myself assigning things that would help me have time in the classroom to work on my essays. Busywork activities felt traitorous, as if I were cheating my students of "real" teaching. As I became more immersed in the requirements of the portfolio and the assessment test, my students became less important. I checked out movies from the library; I assigned in-class reading and long silent writing time; I sat at my desk and worked on National Board Standards. I was living a paradox: to prove I was a good teacher, I was violating everything I believed a good teacher to be.

Palmer asserts that as children we are trained to think in paradoxes: facts vs. feelings, community vs. solitude, and head vs. heart. Now at the completion of the process, I ask myself whether a test which tries to measure both the contraries of Palmer's paradoxes, the facts and feelings of teaching, a test which endeavors to reach the heart of a teacher, can truly be valid. As I struggled to reach my students and my own goals, I found Palmer's book a salve to my soul. He asked the very questions I was asking. The paradoxes he discussed fed directly into my classroom, condoning my right to ask questions, encouraging me to embrace the questions and showing me how to "think together" my idea of success and failure.

Intellectual, Emotional, and Spiritual Paths to Good Teaching

Sherri Phillips Merritt
Leesville High School, Raleigh, NC

I began reading *The Courage to Teach* at a time when my courage was getting pretty low — while working on my dissertation. Because I did a qualitative action research study with four colleagues at my own school, I was particularly prone to reflecting on my own teaching, even while collecting and analyzing data. As a result, I felt the fear that comes with facing one's teaching demons. With every teacher interview, with every student focus group, I realized everything *I* wasn't doing right as a teacher. I could catch glimmers of who I *ought* to be as a teacher, but I felt that I was far from being there. I knew, however, that Parker J. Palmer had something to say to me when he wrote, "This book is for teachers who have good days and bad, and whose bad days bring the suffering that comes only from something one loves" (p. 1). I was indeed suffering through some of the bad days as I began a downward spiral of self-doubt about my own teaching.

The pain that I have felt the most often in my teaching the past few years stemmed primarily from the split I saw between myself as a teacher and myself as a graduate student. Reading Palmer's book helped me see that the dichotomy I was creating (the theory-me versus the reality-me) was false and not even necessary. Gradually I began to see that I had been looking "out there" to improve myself as a teacher. I had been looking outside myself for educational theories and teaching techniques that I could blend together to make myself a better teacher. When the theory and the practice didn't match, I became frustrated and felt like a hypocrite. What I was missing, though, should have been obvious: I had neglected to figure myself into the equation. My teaching needed to be bigger than just the theory behind it or the technique being used to deliver it: it needed to be a reflection of my own soul.

Palmer gives us permission to spend energy delving into ourselves when he writes, "...knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my

students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life — and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well" (p. 2). I needed to remember who I am— a decent person, a passionate person, someone who feels deeply about people and ideas. But I also needed to recognize that contradictions live inside us all. When I became willing to accept the paradoxes of my teaching self, and the messiness that comes with that, I found that my focus on theory-versus-practice was keeping my teaching on the intellectual level. I was avoiding going any deeper; as a result, I felt shallow as a teacher. Palmer argues that the inner landscape of the teaching life contains three important paths that must be taken — intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. For me, it was by recognizing both my intellectual attachment to the subject as well as acknowledging my emotional and spiritual self that I could come even closer to being a great teacher. These were insights I brought to our discussion of Palmer's book at the CAWP Institute.

So much of the conversation teachers have with one another is of the "guess-what-happened-last-period" or "do-you-have-any-stuff-I-can-borrow-for-my-Odyssey-unit-next- week" variety. We already recognize in National Writing Project sites that we must dig deeper if we want to examine our teaching and our teaching selves. *The Courage to Teach* was an excellent tool for helping us do just that. We delved not only into our teaching but also our beliefs about teaching. We discussed how our philosophies differ from our practice at times and how problematic that can be. We attempted to give voice to some of our fears about teaching in an effort to better understand what we do and why we do it. We even tried to understand what it is that allows some of us to be assertive while others cringe in fear of confrontation. In short, we tried to find the courage to keep on teaching even when faced with problems in the classroom, self-doubts, and unanswerable questions.

By the time I had finished reading *The Courage to Teach,* I had also finally finished my dissertation. Amazingly, I had regained some of the courage I needed to face the task of being a teacher. Through my reading and the discussions we had in our workshop, I found the courage to embrace the contradictions in my teaching life, the courage to share my insights with my colleagues, and the courage to walk into my classroom and be myself.

A Different Type of Learning Environment

Andy Jackl
Fuquay-Varina High School, Fuquay-Varina, NC

In *The Courage to Teach* (Jan. 1998) Parker J. Palmer examines the concept of "community" in education, or, in other words, the environmental prerequisites necessary for successful teaching and learning. To this end, Palmer examines the three most common models of community with a critical and discerning eye, beginning with the therapeutic model, which underscores the need for intimacy in all meaningful human relationships. This model is of limited value for educators because we have far too many students in our classes to establish deep rapport, and intimacy cannot be demanded or hurried. The civic model of community, on the other hand, calls for people to ignore their individual differences and unite for the common good. The model has roots thousands of years old, but Palmer notes that in a civic society controversial issues are settled by democratic politics, and the truth is often lost in negotiation, bargaining, and compromise. Lastly, Palmer discusses the relatively new marketing model, which perceives educational institutions as businesses that must satisfy their consumers — students and parents. But since education is more process than product, an outstanding teacher may often leave his or her students dissatisfied or angry as prejudices and misconceptions are challenged and overcome; feelings of discontent may in fact be the consequence of real learning and personal growth. Palmer then offers another model of community that he believes every educator should strive to create in his or her classroom: the Community of Truth.

The Community of Truth is a powerful concept with practical ramifications for classroom teachers. Once the concept is understood, it can change the way we teach in dynamic and exciting ways. To begin with, Palmer explains that most classroom environments are either teacher-centered or student-centered. In the teacher-centered classrooms the teacher is an "expert" in the content area and the students are expected to listen and learn. Unfortunately there are no ultimate authorities in our subject areas, and the most we can hope for is that our students will be able to memorize and recite our opinions, perceptions, and conclusions. The student-centered classrooms, by comparison, are powered by the "active learning" methodology, but any educator who has tried group work with students can tell you how easily the

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learning process can degenerate or go astray.

To Palmer each of these environments in its pure form is a threat to learning: absolutism, which occurs when the experts claim to precisely know all the answers, and relativism, which happens when we throw up our hands and announce that the answers depend solely on one's own personal opinion. In teaching literature, the first threat is manifest when a teacher implies that there is only one preferred, correct reading of a text; the second threat surfaces when an impatient teacher gives up on students whose literary interpretations rest too heavily on their naive, esoteric responses.

Palmer's compromise is ingenious in its simplicity. He proposes a "subject-centered" classroom in which there are no pure objects of knowledge, and no ultimate authorities. The very nature of truth, he submits, is "far from being linear and static and hierarchical... [it] is circular, interactive, and dynamic" (p. 103). In other words, the truth is always changing. Rosenblatt would say that it inheres in the negotiation between the subject/text and the reader. And since we can never reach any permanent conclusions about our subject matter, the truth is transformed from hard knowledge into an "eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline" (p. 104).

Palmer has revolutionized the way I perceive my own English classes and my role as a teacher. I was vaguely aware, as I strove to explicate the canon of literature, that I was only passing on my own "expert" conclusions about the works in question. Worst of all, I had so much confidence in my ability as a scholar that I had the audacity to claim that my interpretations represented the elusive truth. Now I know better. Real truth doesn't flow from the mouths of experts; it originates from the object of study itself. My job is not to pass on the consensus of literary critics or summaries of my own research, for the value and meaning of a work of literature will vary greatly from student to student. My job is to use my energy, enthusiasm, and skill to propel the object itself into the center of our attention while creating a learning environment where we all "understand truth as the passionate and disciplined process of inquiry and dialogue itself, as the dynamic conversation of a community that keeps testing old conclusions and coming up with new ones" (p. 104). In a Community of Truth, then, knowledge grows from the interactive matrix created when teachers and students focus their attention on the object of study. Everyone involved becomes "knowers, teachers, and learners" (p. 107).

The concept of "community" in education represents a small portion of Palmer's book, and many of his other ideas are equally brilliant and insightful. He challenges us, as educators, to reexamine the traditional approaches to education, to take a long and critical look at our own attitudes and perceptions, and openly admit to ourselves what is (and what is not) working in our classrooms. He also asks us to candidly evaluate the type of learning environment we are creating, either consciously or unconsciously, and what impact that model of community is having on the learning process. The need for self-evaluation and personal reflection is a powerful undercurrent in all the chapters, and is a prerequisite for the personal and professional growth the author is advocating. Read his book with an open mind and a willingness to learn. Parker J. Palmer can help you, as he has helped me, become a teacher in the Community of Truth.

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Ruie Prichard is director of North Carolina's Capital Area Writing Project. Nan Massengil, Sherri Merritt and Andy Jackl are TCs with the Capital Area Project.

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